

Bob Taft
Governor



Jacqueline Romer-Sensky
Director

Ohio Department of Human Services
30 East Broad Street, Columbus, Ohio 43266-0423

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OWF/PRC Guidance Letter No. 19

TO: Directors, County Departments of Human Services
Directors, County Public Children Services Agencies
Directors, Child Support Enforcement Agencies

FROM: Jacqueline Romer-Sensky, Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jacqueline Romer-Sensky".

SUBJECT: EARLY START EXPANSION

The Ohio Department of Human Services (ODHS) strongly supports the Early Start program, which is administered by the Ohio Department of Health (DOH). Early Start's goal is to help families create an environment conducive to the growth and development of young children. The target population for Early Start includes pregnant women and families with children under age three.

Research has shown that the first three years of life play a critical role in developing strong minds and bodies necessary for future personal growth and social productivity. Investments in these families, while their children are young, will likely produce long-term benefits for communities and our society at large. For these reasons, ODHS has provided each CDHS with a separate allocation of TANF funds in order to help finance Early Start services for local low-income families.

However, many counties are not using these resources. Following Attachment F-1 in the Early Start Expansion Application (July 27, 1998), many counties established eligibility for Early Start to include only families receiving OWF cash assistance, with services continuing under PRC until the child(ren) turns three if a family leaves OWF.

With a shrinking OWF caseload, however, we believe that fewer and fewer families will benefit from Early Start under this eligibility standard. With the flexibility allowed under PRC, ODHS encourages counties to amend their PRC Plans and expand eligibility for Early Start to include low income families outside the OWF population. We recommend that Early Start be offered to families with children under age three and to pregnant women, with an income at or below 300% of the federal poverty level. Counties should include a statement in their PRC plans that would limit the program to the availability of Early Start funds.

Some counties have already broadened eligibility for Early Start to include more families. In Logan County, non-OWF families with children under the age of three who are at or below 300% of the

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Federal Poverty Guideline can participate in Early Start under the county's PRC program. In Carroll County, Early Start is open to recipients of other human service programs, such as Medicaid, Day Care and Food Stamps. Carroll County also addresses other issues related to Early Start, for example, the application process and how to work with sanctioned individuals. Attached, you will find the sections of Logan and Carroll County's PRC Plans that address Early Start.

It is important to note that sanctioned families and child only cases, where the child is living with a relative or caretaker with legal custody or guardianship, are eligible for Early Start services.

ODHS is working in partnership with the Ohio Department of Health to help counties expand their Early Start services. Both agencies encourage collaboration at the local level among agencies, service providers and Family and Children First Councils. By working together, local partners can quickly identify problems and develop solutions, which will enhance the success of Early Start and its benefit to families and children.

We hope that Early Start will continue to be a recognized and valued program available to families with children under age three and to pregnant women. To increase understanding of the program and address issues, we plan to focus on Early Start at upcoming workshops, videoconferences and regional meetings. If your community has specific program questions regarding Early Start, please contact Debbie Cheatham or Sharon Marcum of the Ohio Department of Health at 614-644-8389. Please contact your regional ODHS Account Manager as you develop a more inclusive PRC plan for Early Start.

JRS:mg

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	Wayne Sholes	Bureau Chiefs in County Operations
	Lou Ann Shy	Fiscal Supervisors
	Regional Account Managers	Family and Children First Coordinators
	Ohio Early Start Program Coordinators	Ohio Department of Health