



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 15, 2022

New Mexico Ranked No. 3 for Identifying Young Children who will Benefit from Early Intervention Services

ECECD promotes FIT program accomplishments during Autism Awareness Month

SANTA FE – In recognition of Autism Awareness Month in April, the New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) Family Infant Toddler (FIT) program reaffirms its commitment to help New Mexico families access high quality, no-cost early intervention services for children from birth to age 3 who have or may be at risk for a developmental delay, while also making sure the services provided are accessible, respectful, and family-centered. The Lujan Grisham administration’s commitment is reflected in New Mexico’s ranking third in the United States for identifying young children who could benefit from early intervention services, as determined by the federal Office of Special Education Programs.

“The New Mexico Family Infant Toddler Program is committed to ensuring that all of New Mexico’s children are supported to fully participate in their families and communities so that the gifts they bring to this world can be fully realized,” said Leah Davidson, FIT program manager. “Our children with autism deserve the best we have to offer in terms of effective intervention and honoring each child’s unique self. We dream of a world that is designed for all of us, regardless of neurological makeup. We are committed to actively building that world by supporting children with autism and their families and supporting the world around them to be a more inclusive place.”

The FIT program has agreements with provider agencies in all 33 counties in New Mexico and maintains a referral process for anyone concerned about a child’s development. These provider agencies employ professionals with a range of skills and backgrounds, from broad family support experience to specialized medical knowledge. Eligibility for services is related to a percentage delay in the child’s development, or one of several diagnoses or risk criteria within the family unit.

In the last fiscal year, despite pivoting to telehealth access because of social distancing measures in place at the time, the FIT program was able to serve 13,261 young children across the state.

Other FIT program accomplishments include:

- Funded an increase in the rate of reimbursement to FIT provider agencies in FY22, following an evaluation of the program's infrastructure to determine the most economic sense to build a robust early intervention system across New Mexico.
- Reduced waitlist for autism evaluations for children from birth to age 3, using \$260,000 in federal funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

About five years ago, Matt C. and his wife noticed that their then-18-month-old daughter was having difficulty meeting developmental milestones, so they enrolled their daughter in early intervention services at Zia Therapy Center, a FIT provider agency in Alamogordo. After performing evaluations, Zia Therapy Center recommended that their daughter be screened for autism, which ended up being a positive diagnosis.

"The early intervention services we received at Zia Therapy Center were terrific and they showed us how to be the strongest advocates for our daughter throughout the entire process," said Matt. "The therapy we received following the autism diagnosis immediately helped us navigate what it meant and implement the appropriate services to teach our daughter and us as parents the critical skills to improve our daily lives."

For parents/guardians who are unsure if their young child is meeting developmental milestones, the FIT program offers an online screening [Ages and Stages Questionnaire](#) in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

Parents seeking FIT services are encouraged to call 1-877-696-1472.

###

The New Mexico Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) launched in 2020, one of only four cabinet level agencies nationwide that consolidated all early childhood agencies under one roof. ECECD's mission is to optimize the health, development, education, and well being of babies, toddlers, and preschoolers through a family-driven, equitable, community-based system of programs and services. Learn more about how ECECD supports children, families, and the early childhood professionals that serve our communities at nmececd.org. On Facebook and Twitter as [@NewMexicoECECD](#).