

Budget cuts hinder children with disabilities

EDITORIALS

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Jacob Casablanca works with speech therapist Elizabeth Price at his home in Hurst in 2015. **G.J. McCarthy** The Dallas Morning News

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Disabled children and their families shouldn't have to jump through hoops for any type of state-funded care.

These kids need the state's help, and we should be able to provide for them. But lawmakers tightened the budget and, with it, reduced access to life-altering services.

A \$350 million Medicaid budget cut went into effect last December. The cut sliced off funding for pediatric therapy, potentially [affecting](#) as many as 60,000 children and their families.

Medicaid therapy cuts meant many children in need of state-funded speech, physical and occupational therapy will have less time with therapists or even have to forgo treatment.

Though early-intervention services are federally protected and have mandated funding, many families and organizations are already seeing a decrease in access to care.

The [Early Childhood Intervention](#) program, a statewide service for children with disabilities under age 3, works with providers to help give these children access to therapy options.

The number of providers available in Texas already dropped from 58 to 47 after the cuts, with 12 more possibly backing out.

Senate Finance Committee chair Jane Nelson, R-Flower Mound, [pledges](#) that everyone who needs early-intervention care will receive it, but prospects are not looking good.

Another state-funded program also is having financial woes.

The Medically Dependent Children Program was overhauled by Texas Health and Human Services last year, now called [STAR Kids](#). STAR Kids provides Medicaid-managed care services for Texans with disabilities under age 20.

The Dallas Morning News [reported](#) some patients lost access to services, had surgeries delayed, or had difficulty getting prescriptions or medical supplies.

In January, many parents pleaded with the Senate Finance Committee to bring more money back into the budget so these children don't have to wait or go without services.

Health and Human Services [asked](#) for \$316 million for early-childhood intervention. House and Senate proposed budgets give about \$280 million.

Finding money to make sure these children have adequate access to care should be a priority.