# Department of Public Health SealStarting Points for EI Service Coordinators

# Visual Impairment

## INFORMATION *This list is not meant to be all inclusive.*

**What are Specialty Services? Specialty Services are provided to children enrolled in an EI program who have been identified as requiring specialized services due to a diagnosis of vision loss, hearing loss, are on the Autism Spectrum, have complex medical needs or multiple disabilities.**

Children with specialty service conditions, including vision loss, may require specialized care and services that may not be appropriately, adequately, or specifically provided within the existing early intervention system.  A clinician with special skills or knowledge may be needed to address outcomes on an IFSP.

***Who is the Specialty Service Provider for children with vision loss?*** *The Department of Public Health contracts with Perkins School for the Blind to provide services to infants and toddlers in the EI system with vision loss.* Be sure to obtain parental consent before contacting the ophthalmologist or primary care practitioner and be mindful that some families may choose to share information with you directly.

REASONS FOR REFERRAL

A child who has been diagnosed with Blindness or Vision Loss is eligible for Early Intervention services as this is an established condition (eligible until 3rd birthday). DPH Diagnosed Conditions List includes:

* Blindness, one or both eyes
* Cortical Vision Impairment (CVI)
* Optic Nerve Atrophy
* Retinopathy of Prematurity (1 year eligibility)
* Low Vision one eye (1 year eligibility)
* Low Vision both eyes

*Other conditions not listed here may also impact a child’s vision. If there are ANY concerns about whether or not to refer to Specialty Services, please contact Perkins.*

Perkins staff is available to share information about their services, appropriate referrals, the referral process, and how Perkins and EI staff can work collaboratively.

REFERRAL PROCESS

* Contact Infant Toddler Social Workers at Perkins School for the Blind: Call **617-972-7332 OR 617-972-7444**

(Fax: 617-972-7231)

* *Children can be referred to Perkins without a vision exam but should be in the process of obtaining a referral and/or appointment.* Contact the primary care provider about the need to refer the child to an eye care professional (*ophthalmologist or optometrist*) if that has not already been done.
* Families are welcome to contact Perkins staff directly. Perkins School for the Blind website: [www.perkins.org](http://www.perkins.org)

WHAT DOES PERKINS PROVIDE TO FAMILIES?

* Functional Vision Assessments by a Vision Specialist
* When needed, direct services to the child and family to support development of vision and other skills
* Consultation and training to other professionals and to early intervention and child care centers working with children with visual impairments
* Parent-child groups for families of children with visual impairments
* Co-visits with EI professionals *(****not limited****)*

THINGS TO CONSIDER

* Referral to Regional Consultation Program (RCP) if child has complex medical needs or multiple disabilities
* Early referral to Local Education Authority (LEA) to allow time for planning
* Adaptive equipment/assistive technology needs

RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH VISION LOSS

Wonder Baby - [www.wonderbaby.org](http://www.wonderbaby.org) - dedicated to helping parents of young children with visual impairments as well as children with multiple disabilities by providing information and resources

**Opportunities to talk with parents of children with vision loss**

* Family TIES (*statewide information, referral and parent to parent support network for families of children with special needs and chronic illness and their providers.* 1-800-905-TIES (8437) or [www.massfamilyties.org](http://www.massfamilyties.org)
* National Association of Parents with Vision Impairment (NAPVI) at [www.napvi.org](http://www.napvi.org)
* American Foundation for the Blind [www.familyconnect.org](http://www.familyconnect.org)

**For Children with combined vision/hearing loss:**

* New England Consortium for Deafblind Technical Assistance and Training (NEC):  A regional deafblind project providing consultation and training to programs serving children with combined vision & hearing loss (deafblindness) (617) 972-7517 <http://www.nec4db.org>
* National Center on Deafblindess:  A national technical assistance center providing deafblind-specific information and resources for families and service providers. <https://nationaldb.org>

OTHER RESOURCES

**Determine eligibility for entitlements**, based on family’s financial situation.

Call the Department of Public Health, Division for Children & Youth with Special Health Needs Community Support Line at 1-800-882-1435 for information on these resources and public benefits (*This is a great place to start if you aren’t sure about a family’s eligibility for other public benefit programs or services*)

* **Mass Health/CommonHealth** (*buy-in program of Mass Health for children with disabilities*)
* **Kaleigh Mulligan** (*home care for children whose severe health care needs require care equivalent to a hospital or nursing facility*)
* **Catastrophic Illness in Children Relief Fund** *(financial reimbursement for families who have extraordinary out-of-pocket expenses relating to their child’s special health care needs*) [www.mass.gov/cicrf](http://www.mass.gov/cicrf)
* **Community Case Management** (*approval for in home nursing for medically fragile children on Mass Health*) 1-800-863-6068
* **SSI** (*Social Security benefits for children with disabilities with limited financial resources)* 1-800-772-1213 [www.ssa.gov/pubs/10026.html](http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/10026.html)
* **WIC** (*nutrition program that provides free nutrition and health education, healthy food and other services to families who qualify*) To **apply call 1-800-WIC-1007 or the WIC program in your community.**
* **SNAP** (*Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (to help low-income households buy* *food*) <http://www.mass.gov/snap>