

# What is EPSDT?



## Early.

Sponsors of the EPSDT [legislation](#) identified the need for [preventive, proactive](#) health care. The EPSDT benefit provides for a program of health care beginning at birth and extending throughout a young person's eligibility for Medicaid services.



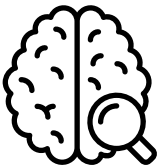
## Periodic.

Screening must begin with a neonatal exam and continue through age 21 years. The [screening schedule](#) must be consistent with 'reasonable standards of medical and dental practice,' such as the [guidelines](#) provided by the American Academy of Pediatrics.



## Screening.

States must provide "regularly scheduled [examinations and evaluations](#) of the general physical and mental health, growth, development, and nutritional status of infants, children, and youth." Commonly used screening tools are described [here](#).



## Diagnosis.

The screening provision of the benefit is designed to identify persons who would benefit from further assessment, and referral to treatment services. [Diagnostic services](#) help clarify an identified concern and prescribe a course of treatment or other services.



## Treatment.

EPSDT is designed "[so that health problems are averted or diagnosed and treated as early as possible](#)." Treatment must be [timely](#), including [scheduling and transportation supports](#) to access the service. It must also encompass [any needed medical services](#), regardless of whether the service is covered in a State's Plan.

*...want more details and links to sources? Head to page 2!*

# What is EPSDT?

## Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT)

### History

States were given great latitude to define Medicaid plan benefits. Very quickly, it was clear that important children's healthcare services were excluded from benefit plans. The [EPSDT benefit](#) addresses this by requiring states to provide **any needed medical service** for children and youth under 21 years of age, so long as it is necessary to treat or ameliorate a condition.

### Practical Implications

States pay for a portion of Medicaid services. They have a short-term incentive to limit available services and service duration. The EPSDT benefit offers a counterbalance. It makes explicit that services are to be provided based on their ability to impact the child or youth's development. Services may be provided for as long as they are needed to correct or ameliorate a healthcare condition.

### How States Have Responded

The [GAO has found](#) that states do not routinely provide all of EPSDT's required scheduled screenings. Reports also indicate that states use [different definitions](#) of 'medical necessity,' which can become a barrier to accessing EPSDT services.

More recently, some states have embraced EPSDT's original preventive intent. California has [recently implemented](#) a series of reforms to the procedures used to authorize EPSDT services, including removing the requirement for a diagnosis to be able to authorize a service.

### System Implications

The EPSDT benefit may be the single most powerful legal tool available to ensure access to appropriate, proactive care. Implemented as intended it provides the care needed to address behavioral health challenges early and effectively.

**EPSDT "means— (1) Screening and diagnostic services to determine physical or mental defects in beneficiaries under age 21; and (2) Health care, treatment, and other measures to correct or ameliorate any defects and chronic conditions discovered."**

*-42 CFR § 440.40(b)*