

HARNESSING TECHNOLOGY TO TRANSFORM EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS

A Model for Coordinating Eligibility & Enrollment in Public Programs



South Carolina is the first state to offer families access to programs across the state's early childhood system through a single web portal, saving state agencies time and money while streamlining the process for families.

Now the developers of this innovative technology are offering free assistance to help other states replicate the model.



Providing children with access to education, healthcare, and social supports during their first five years is critical to ensuring they reach their full potential. However, navigating large and complex systems that operate in silos can be challenging for families and create added workload for program administrators. South Carolina is addressing these challenges with First Five SC, an online resource that coordinates eligibility and enrollment across the state's publicly funded early childhood programs.

First5sc.org offers information about more than 60 of the state's publicly funded programs and services across 10 state agencies, including child care, preschool programs, healthcare, special needs services, food and nutrition assistance, parenting support, and more. With a few clicks, families can assess their eligibility for various programs and services, find options available in their community, and apply for multiple programs with one application. **In its first year, the platform attracted more than 100,000 visitors. Of those who completed the eligibility screener, nearly 80 percent qualified for at least one program.**

A Family-Centered Approach

Designed with input from 2,500+ parents and caretakers throughout the state, First Five SC is accessible on a computer or cell phone. A parent can answer a few simple questions about their child, household, and circumstances, and immediately learn about the choices available to them. They can then complete a single, online application to apply for the programs and services that best meet their needs. The completed application automatically goes to each relevant agency for processing, saving families time and eliminating the need for staff to replicate efforts and key in additional data.



When our two-year-old daughter was diagnosed with an extremely rare syndrome that impacted her hearing, we didn't know where to start. First Five SC highlighted resources such as Family Connections of SC, which coached us through the application process. Having all that information in one centralized place was key to getting the right kind of help.

— **KATIE HAGAN**
South Carolina parent



First Five SC puts health providers 10 steps ahead by offering information about all available programs in one place. No matter where families live or what's going on in their community, First Five SC gives everyone equal access to the supports and services that meet their needs.

— **STEPHANIE TURNER**
Autism Division Director, SC Department of
Disabilities and Special Needs

Ensuring Equity in Early Childhood Systems

Through purposeful collaboration across the state's early childhood system, South Carolina is serving more families faster while sustaining their engagement in the early childhood system. Maximizing family and parental choice, First Five SC offers a model for advancing equity and changing the trajectory of communities throughout the country that are experiencing generational poverty and social discrimination.

Web site functionality ensures compliance with data privacy and allows participating providers to update information related to their programs, eligibility, and due dates as needed. The tool meets the state's accessibility requirements and is reviewed and updated annually to ensure ongoing compliance.



Other States Can Do This Too

South Carolina is the first state to offer families access to programs across the state's early childhood system through a single web portal. The First Five SC team is eager to share tips and strategies for adopting this model in other early childhood systems throughout the country. From laying the groundwork and engaging partners to securing funding and navigating the procurement process to building the portal and spreading the word, we have been there, done that—and we are ready to help you do it, too.



First Five SC is improving the quality of life for South Carolina families. This one-stop-shop allows busy families to maximize their time while connecting with all the services and supports their children are eligible for.

— **BEVERLY BROCKINGTON**

Assistant State WIC Director, Bureau of Nutrition Services, SC Department of Health & Environment Control

We're Here to Help

The **First Five SC Toolkit** is a free and open resource that system leaders can use to develop a centralized access point for recruitment, eligibility determination, and enrollment.



Access the First Five SC Toolkit

Our team is also standing by to offer **technical assistance** at no cost. Whether you are at the initial stages of planning or ready to construct your portal, we are here to assist you along the way.

Send your questions and requests for technical assistance to: **KOliver@scfirststeps.org**

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South Carolina
**Early Childhood
Advisory Council**