

First Steps Information Bulletin



SUBJECT: First Steps Family Cost Participation Fees
INTENDED AUDIENCE: First Steps Families
UPDATED: March 5, 2010

Missouri law, 160.920, requires families participating in the First Steps program to make a financial contribution to the cost of the services and mandates private health insurance coverage for certain First Steps services. This document will provide families with information on family cost participation.

Family Cost Participation...What is it and how does it affect me? Some families who participate in First Steps will be required to make a monthly payment to the First Steps system. The Central Finance Office (CFO) will send a bill to families on a monthly basis if there is a monthly fee applicable to them. Monthly payments may be made by check or money order.

What is the purpose of this payment? In 2005, the Missouri legislature determined that the First Steps system could not sustain itself with only state and federal funding and made the decision that all families not specifically exempted must contribute a nominal monthly amount in order to participate in the program. This monthly fee is not tied to a particular service or amount of services. A single monthly fee is calculated for “family participation” in First Steps regardless of the number of children actually receiving services. The fee amount varies between \$5 per month and \$100 per month based on:

- A) A family’s adjusted income
- B) The number of family members in the household

Who is required to pay this monthly fee to participate in First Steps?

- Families eligible and enrolled in Medicaid **are not** required to pay this monthly fee.
- A family must have an annual adjusted gross income at or above 200% of the federally established poverty level before their obligation to pay a monthly fee is triggered.

Families must provide documentation to the Service Coordinator showing enrollment in Medicaid in order to receive the Medicaid monthly fee exclusion.

How is the annual adjusted gross income calculated? What financial document will I be required to present to the Service Coordinator? A family’s annual adjusted gross income is the “adjusted gross income” calculation on the most recent (prior year) federal income tax form(s) (typically Form 1040, 1040A, 1040EZ or an efile tax form).

Are there any other considerations that affect how much my monthly fee will be? Yes. If a family encounters “financial hardship”, your monthly fee may be affected. Financial hardship in First Steps is defined as:

- Loss of home
- Loss of job (one or more income earners)
- Extensive medical costs incurred/documented in the current year

If one of these three events occurs, you should contact the Service Coordinator to reevaluate the existing monthly fee amount.

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The Service Coordinator has four options when “financial hardship” is claimed by the family:

- The monthly fee could be reduced to the lowest allowable monthly fee amount (\$5).
- The monthly fee could be recalculated to the appropriate fee amount based on a reduced adjusted gross income due to loss of one wage earner. (Income change by more than 10%)
- The monthly fee could be eliminated altogether.
- No change/action will be taken.

Based on documentation provided by the family, if a fee adjustment is determined to be appropriate, the Service Coordinator will make the change and the adjusted fee amount will appear in the next monthly billing cycle.

What happens if I provide false or misleading information, or do not wish to provide any financial documentation to the Service Coordinator to determine the monthly fee amount?

You may provide financial information to the Service Coordinator during one of several possible data/information collection sessions (during the intake process for families initially coming into First Steps, inter-periodic reviews, annual IFSP review or when your family’s annual adjusted gross income changes by more than 10%). State regulation provides that if a family does not provide documentation necessary to calculate the monthly participation fee or provides false or misleading information, the monthly fee amount may be increased to the highest monthly level allowed by law (\$100 per month).

What happens if I do not pay this calculated monthly fee each month? If a family is over 30 days delinquent in the payment of the calculated monthly fee, the amount in arrears will be indicated on the monthly statement at 30 and 60 days. On the 75th day of non-payment/payment in arrears, the financially responsible person/head of household will be notified by mail that early intervention services will end as of the 90th day of non-payment/payment in arrears. No further services will be provided (except for those services required to be provided at no cost such as service coordination and evaluation) to the family/child until all delinquent payments are current. Service providers will be notified by email from the CFO when service authorizations are cancelled due to family non-payment/payment in arrears of monthly family participation fees.

If you have questions concerning family cost participation, you should contact your Service Coordinator or System Point of Entry (SPOE) office at 866-583-2392.