



Each year, approximately 9,000 babies are born in North Dakota hospitals. Only 38% of these infants have their hearing screened before they are discharged. Newborn hearing screening is rapidly becoming a standard of care across the country. Research confirms that treatment outcomes are most positive when infant hearing loss is identified and intervention started prior to the seventh month of age (Yoshinaga-Itano, 1999). Without Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI), nearly 50% of newborns with hearing losses will not be diagnosed until the second year of life, missing an important therapeutic window (NIH, 1993; JCIH, 1994). Early identification and intervention is proving to be a cost-effective approach for improving the cognitive, social, and language development of children with hearing difficulties.

The North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities at Minot State University in cooperation with Children's Special Services of North Dakota Department of Human obtained federal funding for the First Sounds Project in April, 2000. The **goal** of the First Sounds Project is to provide hearing screening to every baby born in North Dakota prior to hospital discharge in order to assist in early identification of hearing loss and help get babies with hearing impairment started on the right track as soon as possible. Prior to discharge, all newborns will be screened using Evoked Otoacoustic Emissions (OAE) or Auditory Brainstem Evoked Response (ABR).

A total of \$175,000 over the duration of the project has been set aside to assist facilities in obtaining infant hearing screening equipment. These funds will be made available to approximately twenty-seven facilities over the life of the grant. Hospitals may access the funds by entering into a cooperative agreement with the North Dakota First Sounds Project. The project is assisting participating hospitals in purchasing the screening equipment of their choice as well as providing the hospital staff with training on how to conduct the screenings according to the First Sounds protocol. Additionally, the project is providing training to each participating hospital regarding screening protocols, recording and reporting screening data to a statewide tracking system, and how to make appropriate referrals when necessary.