

International Society on Early Intervention Conference Lisbon 2-5 September 2025



The International Society on Early Intervention (ISEI) holds a conference every 3 years. In September this year, in partnership with Eurlayid, the European Association on Early Childhood Intervention, ISEI held its 8th conference in Lisbon, Portugal. The conference theme was “Advancing Comprehensive Early Childhood Intervention”, and it brought together over 800 representatives from 60 countries across six continents. These professionals and researchers were from a range of disciplines, including paediatric medicine, psychology, special education, early childhood education, occupational therapy, speech pathology, physiotherapy, and more.

A focus on the importance of preparation and continued development of those working in the field of early childhood intervention (ECI) was introduced in Mary Beth Bruder’s pre-conference workshop “Early Childhood Intervention Systems: The Role of Personnel” and was a theme that continued throughout the conference. Ana Maria Serrano’s keynote presentation on the first day of the conference provided an overview of how the Guidelines for Evidence Based Practices to support Professional Development of the Portuguese Early Intervention System (SNIPI) were developed. Other researchers presented both paper and poster presentations that explored how these guidelines, and other similar guidelines for best practice in ECI, had been implemented in Portugal and other countries.

The role of coaching as a key form of professional development for those working with young children and their families was presented across several paper presentations and symposia. Topics included various models of collaborative consultation and coaching, such as the use of remote coaching models, as well as group, peer, and self-coaching. Additionally, the importance of professional development in preparing coaches with the necessary skills to succeed in their roles was emphasised. Whether an ECI professional is working with a family at home or in the community, or early childhood educators in early learning environments, coaching can be a tool to open the door to a more inclusive experience for young children with disabilities or developmental delays. Inclusion in early education and in the community more broadly was another theme that ran through many of the presentations at the conference.

In Carl Dunst’s keynote presentation, “Lessons Learned from Applied Family Systems Early Childhood Intervention Research and Practice”, he provided an overview of the ‘lessons learned’ over his career of more than 50 years, with a specific focus on family-centred practice. Through reflections on research and practice, he described the Family Systems model of ECI, including choosing interventions based on family-identified needs, supporting families to identify sources of social supports and resources to meet those needs, assisting families to identify and use their strengths, and the role of the professional in

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using relational and participatory family-centred capacity building practices. A strength-based approach to working with families of young children was another theme that ran through multiple presentations throughout the conference, from participatory practices, involving families in service delivery, and models of home visiting, to ways of measuring family outcomes, including family quality of life.

This year's conference program included inaugural ISEI Special Interest Groups on (1) **workforce preparation and continuing education**, (2) **inclusion**, and (3) **paediatric involvement in ECI**. I attended both the workforce preparation and continuing education, as well as the inclusion special interest groups, which were well-attended, with over 80 people in each from various countries and regions. In these initial meetings, the chairs listened to attendees about the direction of each group and what would be most beneficial for members. Suggestions included communities of practice, the development of definitions and position statements, resource and information sharing, webinars, and examples of research and practice. The ISEI Coordinating Committee and Special Interest Group chairs will consider these ideas and provide opportunities for these international special interest groups to convene virtually in the coming year.

Membership to ISEI is free, includes a membership directory and access to one free research article from the interdisciplinary ECI journal *Infants and Young Children* each issue. With the addition of the Special Interest Groups, I encourage anyone who is not yet a member to join. More information is available at <https://isei-earlychildhoodintervention.org/member-resources/>.



Dr. Sarah Carlon