



THE ARC, AAIDD, AUCD,  
UCP, NACDD AND SABE

## FACT SHEET

---

### AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)

#### Background

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on the prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), approximately 1 in every 150 American children has a potential diagnosis of ASD. Continued research is needed to document trends in the growth of ASD, as well as research into and development of effective interventions. In 2006, President Bush signed into law the Combating Autism Act of 2006 (PL 109-416) to authorize more research on ASD through the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and CDC. The Act also provides the first step to expand the interdisciplinary training of health professionals to identify and support children with ASD and their families. However, greater commitments are also needed to expand access to services such as early identification, diagnosis, early intervention, education, family support, and long-term services and supports to better meet the needs of individuals with ASD and related developmental disabilities. Individuals with ASD and their families need access to accurate information about scientifically-based interventions. The training of a wide range of interdisciplinary professionals also needs to be a top priority so that the findings coming out of our research institutions can be translated and made available to parents and providers across the country as quickly as possible.

#### Action Taken by Congress and the Administration

On April 2, Sens. Durbin (D-IL), Casey (D-PA), and Menendez (D-NJ) introduced the *Autism Treatment Acceleration Act* (S. 819). This bill, originally drafted with President Obama when he was in the Senate, incorporates some of the provisions of the *Expanding the Promise to Individuals with Autism Act* introduced by Sen. Clinton in the last Congress, but also adds several new provisions to accelerate the development of a services system to meet the needs of individuals with autism spectrum disorders and related developmental disabilities.

The bill creates demonstration projects to increase access to quality health care services and coordination of care as well as to develop and provide an array of services to adults with autism spectrum disorders; develops a national multimedia campaign to increase public education and awareness about healthy milestones and autism throughout the lifespan; establishes a national network to link research and service initiatives at the federal, regional, state and local levels; and, establishes an Interdepartmental Coordinating Committee to coordinate Federal activities relating to research, services, and programs for individuals with autism spectrum disorders.

The bill also establishes multiyear national training initiative on autism and a technical assistance center to significantly develop and expand interdisciplinary training and continuing education on autism spectrum disorders. These training initiatives will promote and engage in training for health, allied health, and educational professionals to identify, diagnose, and provide interventions for individuals with ASD; collect data; provide technical assistance; and work to expand training on and disseminate of information regarding effective, lifelong interventions, educational services, and

community supports, including training for criminal justice system personnel and emergency first responders.

A requirement that health insurers cover the diagnosis and treatment of autism spectrum disorders, including Applied Behavior Analysis, assistive communication devices and other effective treatments is also added.

The bill was referred to the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. No corresponding bill has been introduced in the House.

### **Recommendations**

The 111<sup>th</sup> Congress should:

- Provide the necessary funds to focus our country's researchers on explaining the apparent increase in prevalence, on finding the causes, and on determining the most effective ways of supporting children and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders by fully funding the Combating Autism Act
  - \$143.5 million to expand, intensify, and coordinate the activities of the National Institutes of Health with respect to research on autism spectrum disorder.
  - \$19.5 million for the CDC's Disabilities Surveillance and Research Program.
  - \$47 million to increase awareness, reduce barriers to screening and diagnosis, promote evidence-based interventions, and train professionals.
- Support the Autism Treatment Acceleration Act and other legislation that addresses the direct service and interdisciplinary training needs associated with the increasing number of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

### **Relevant Committees**

House and Senate Appropriations Committees

Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee

House Energy and Commerce Committee (Subcommittee on Health)

House and Senate Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations Subcommittees

For more information, please contact The Arc and United Cerebral Palsy Disability Policy Collaboration (202) 783-2229, Association of University Centers on Disability (301) 588-8252, American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (202) 387-1968, National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (202) 506-5813 or the Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (802) 760-8856.

4/13/09