

Update: Autism Services in Texas

Statewide planning for services and supports for children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is challenging because understanding of the disorder is evolving, individual needs can vary widely, and the availability of the patchwork of services does not currently meet the known demand.

Due to recent action taken by the 84th Texas Legislature and guidance from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), more people in Texas may have access to the full array of services and supports necessary to meet their individual needs.

State-Funded Autism Services

Services for children with ASD received significant attention during the 84th Texas Legislature. The appropriations allocated during the legislative session for autism services are detailed below.

- \$14.4 million was allocated to the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) to:
 - phase out Comprehensive applied behavior analysis (ABA) for children enrolled by August 15, 2015;
 - expand access to Focused ABA; and
 - provide services to 1,970 children (295 children received services in 2014).
- \$8.1 million was allocated to the Higher Education Coordinating Board to purchase trainings for shareholders to reach more children with ASD through the indirect service provision. The funds will be used for:
 - parent-directed treatment training (\$4.5 million);
 - board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA) training for teachers and paraprofessionals (\$1.9 million);
 - research, development, and evaluation of innovative treatment models (\$1.4 million); and
 - administrative support (\$300,000).

During the 84th Texas Legislature, a bill to license BCBA's in Texas failed to pass. Although BCBA's have national certification, state licensure is necessary in order to bill Medicaid for work done by people they supervise. People in favor of licensure state that it will increase the number of BCBA's in Texas (currently about 900) and also that it will prevent unqualified persons from representing themselves as experts in behavior analysis. Opponents of the bill were concerned that qualification for licensure did not require the same level of training and experience as similar professions. Legislation to license BCBA's will likely be reintroduced during the 85th Texas Legislative Session that convenes January 10, 2017.

Medicaid-Funded Autism Services

In July 2014, CMS issued a letter titled Clarification of Medicaid Coverage of Services to Children with Autism. The letter instructed states to make all covered services available in order to meet each child's individual needs. States were instructed to cover the services listed below.

- Services under the Social Security Act, including:
 - services of other licensed practitioners
 - preventive services
 - therapy services
 - services funded under the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) program
 - physician services
 - private duty nursing
 - personal care services
 - home health
 - medical equipment and supplies
 - rehabilitative services
- Vision, hearing, and dental services
- Speech, occupational, and physical therapies

The CMS letter led Texas Medicaid officials to begin working on making services – like those available to children enrolled in EPSDT – available to adults on a statewide basis as part of the Medicaid State Plan. Once the updated Medicaid State Plan is implemented, Texas will be closer to providing the full array of services and supports necessary to meet the individual needs of every child and adult diagnosed with ASD.

Published date: July 15, 2015