Massachusetts Autism Commission

Meeting Minutes

September 15, 2022, 1:00 p.m.– 3:00 p.m.

Via Zoom

Autism Commission Members Present: Jane Ryder (DDS), Carolyn Kain (EHS), Elizabeth Morse (DDS), Janet George (DDS), Emma Vazquez for Rep. Christine Barber (HOU), Sen. Joan Lovely (SEN), Joshua Tavares for Sen. Ryan Fattman (SEN), Rep. Joseph McKenna (HOU), Ann Reale (EOE), Kate Ginnis (EHS), Tina Render for Kathy Sanders (DMH), Christine Hubbard, Russell Johnston (DESE), Bronia Clifton (DHCD), Emily White (DPH), Michele Brait, Katherine Canada (DCF), JoAnn Simons, Amy Weinstock, Karen Wylie (OEA), Teresa Schirmer and Amy Kershaw (EEC)

Guests: Hannah Mori (SEN), Mi-Haita James (DYS), Michelle Harris (DDS), Chris Peltier, Jean Chebator and Yahaira Lopez

Meeting Minutes: Dianne Lescinskas (EHS)

Approval of the Minutes from February 24, 2022

Commissioner Ryder called the meeting to order and asked for a motion to approve the meeting minutes from the Autism Commission meeting on February 24, 2022. Ms. Weinstock made a motion to approve the minutes and Mr. Johnston seconded the motion. A roll call was done with members approving the minutes and abstaining from the vote were the following members: Amy Kershaw and Ms. Render for Kathy Sanders. Ms. Kain asked if there were any questions or comments on the minutes and seeing none, the minutes from February 24, 2022 were approved.

**Review Proposed Recommendations from the Subcommittees**

***Birth-14 Subcommittee Recommendations***

Russell Johnston presented the recommendations put forth by the subcommittee members.

* DESE IEP Improvement Project – the work will continue, and subcommittee members continue to give valuable feedback as it relates to individuals with ASD.
* Access to Aided and Augmentative Communication (AAC) Devices for Children with ASD – addressing barriers to obtaining and fully implementing dedicated and non-dedicated AAC devices by accessing data from state agencies and other resources.
* Inclusion for students with ASD – reviewing statewide data on level of inclusion (full/partial/sub separate) for students with ASD disaggregated by race, language spoken at home and determine next steps towards improving opportunities for inclusion.
* Age of Diagnosis – review available information related to the age of diagnosis, particularly focusing on accessibility of assessments and wait list times.
* Coordinated State Agency Support – invited members from DCF, DDS and DMH to participate on the subcommittee so that the subcommittee can continue to support the coordination of state agency services.
* Transition from Early Intervention to Special Education – examine available information related to the transition from EI to special education, with a focus on the timeliness of the transition and continuity of supports.

***School-Aged (14-22) Employment Subcommittee Recommendations***

Ms. Stadhard presented the recommendation put forth by the subcommittee members.

* Educational information and materials to request Longer Day Services as part of the IEP Services – this recommendation was revised from 2019 and it is looking to ensure that information is provided to prevent the need of a more restrictive setting – this recommendation provides more clarification and a specific ask – recommending that the information be developed by DESE and the Federation with input from the subcommittee members.

***Adult Subcommittee Recommendations***

Ms. Hubbard presented the recommendations put forward by subcommittee members.

* Focus of the recommendation is on the impact of the post pandemic workforce crisis on day and employment services for adults with ASD – it is a 3-part recommendation, 1.) Data be compiled from MH, MRC and DDS as to how many adults who were receiving day and/or employment services have not returned to such services. 2.) Data to be compiled from DESE and DDS as to the status of day, employment and residential services who turned 22 during the pandemic. 3.) Data be examined to determine the degree to which high needs individuals are being impacted by the workforce crisis due to more intensive staffing needs.
* This recommendation relates to aging individuals with ASD – 5-part recommendation – 1.) The Adult Subcommittee will work with the Healthcare Subcommittee and the Insurance Resource Center for Autism and Behavioral Health, MassHealth and other appropriate agencies to identify the source of barriers to coverage of ancillary therapies encountered by adults with ASD as they age and transition into Medicare. 2.) Addressing barriers for aging individuals with ASD who are transitioning into Medicare – reaching out to CMS and policy makers – reaching out to EOEA on how to communicate with aging autistics. 3.) Engage with a research group such as the Gerontology to mine SS data to generate prevalence estimates of individuals accessing SS in MA. 4.) Work with the EOEA to offer training to staff at senior centers and other agencies that have direct contact with older adults – be able to refer to resources to plan for when the last parent/family member dies. 5.) Work with EOEA to develop and roll out a statewide program of future planning workshops for autism families not previously connected to future planning resources – currently, future planning workshops tend to be attended by folks already connected to the system.

***Healthcare Subcommittee Recommendations***

Ms. Ginnis presented the recommendations put forward from subcommittee members.

* Autism Treatment Access and Coverage – expand access to diagnostic resources for families – this is a long-standing issue – expand ASD diagnostic training for general pediatricians, ensure patients with more complex needs and profiles can be evaluated sooner, explore statutory changes to recognize ASD diagnosis by a wider range of professionals.
* MassHealth extend coverage of medically necessary treatments for persons over the age of 21 diagnosed with ASD *(this is not a recommendation from MassHealth and Ms. Ginnis has abstained from this recommendation)* This recommendation has been put forth previously and MassHealth did a cost analysis – a significant amount of money is provided for up to age 22 for this coverage and MassHealth does not plan to expand the coverage.
* Expand Training of Healthcare Professionals – continue to explore the expansion of training on ASD and appropriate strategies for assisting individuals with ASD – expand training across the behavioral health roadmap.

***Housing Subcommittee Recommendations***

Ms. Clifton presented the recommendations put forward by subcommittee members.

* Design Guidelines – development of additional design guidelines that will meet the needs of individuals with ASD to obtain and sustain tenancy in supportive affordable state funded housing units. Recommendation to engage an architect to assist the subcommittee with the review and submission of additional design guidelines to support individuals with ASD in accessing affordable supportive housing. There are several homes with ASD design in mind in the pipeline and one has already been funded – DDS would need to weigh in since this is the population they serve.

**State Agency Updates (2022)**

Commissioner Ryder, Ms. Morse and Ms. Harris presented updates for DDS

***DDS***

* Children’s Autism Waiver - Services continue up to 10th birthday – planned amendment to current waiver to extend services up to 10th birthday – Family Support/Autism Center procurement
* ARPA Children’s Autism Waiver Expansion – ARPA $9.4MM – 75 new waiver participants each year over the next 3 years – increasing clinical managers from 7-10 – 2 supervisor positions created, and staff hired to oversee two teams of 5- recruitment campaign to expand the pool of qualified autism service providers- adding additional staff at the Autism Support Centers
* Adult Autism Supports – as of June 30th, 3632 individuals are eligible for Community Developmental Disabilities Supports, an increase of 544 in FY22

(18–22-year-old -1288 22-year-old + - 2344)

* New Community Developmental Disabilities Services became available on July 1, 2021 – Pre-Engagement/Coaching 232 currently enrolled, College Navigation – 110 enrolled

***DDS and DMH***

* Expanded Residential Services for Individuals with ASD and Behavioral Health Diagnosis – ARPA $6.9 MM – Develop 2-5 home statewide, two respite homes proposed, RFR posting for 3/1/23 – wrapping DMH clinical support – working on details sharing the work between the 2 agencies.
* Expanded In-Home Services for Individuals with ASD and Behavioral Health Diagnoses – ARPA $5.3MM – creating a short and long-term model of supports, 5 programs statewide, In-Home projected RFR posting for 1/1/23. DDS and DMH Fellowship program for individuals with more challenging diagnoses/needs.

Russell Johnston presented updates from DESE.

***DESE***

* Improved Tools and Flexibilities – DESE’s IEP Improvement Project added specific section to the updated IEP Draft Form to prominently focus on autism needs. This has always been a requirement on the IEP but now it will be called out more prominently. The new IEP is still being developed and there have been focus groups and stakeholder feedback – there will be early adopters of the IEP and schools participating in the roll out. Waivers were also issued to allow students with ASD attending ASES schools to continue to attend those schools for a period after they turn 22.
* New Guidance – DESE issued COVID-19 Special Education Technical Assistance Advisory 2021-1 and Family Fact Sheet: COVID-19 Compensatory Services and Recovery Support for Students with IEPs during the pandemic to support schools and districts to recover as much as possible from the school disruptions.
* Funding and Supports – DESE/DDS/MAICEI/MRC collaboration established to fund and provide $10 million in additional transition services for adults who turned 22 during COVID – will be available this Fall.
* DESE’s office for College, Career, and Technical Education established a new Equitable Access Resources and Supports Initiative – including a $2.4 million supplementary grant. A new partnership with CAST and the Multistate Association for Bilingual Education, Northeast with $2 million in targeted grants has been forged.

Ms. Ginnis presented updates from MassHealth

***MassHealth***

* During the pandemic, MassHealth did not terminate any members
* A lot of work has been done in Behavioral Health – invested in and worked closely with Cambridge Health Alliance to support the development of their inpatient Neurodevelopmental Disorders Unit, which opened in spring of 2022
* Invested in and supported the development of Autism-specific Community-Based Acute Treatment (CBAT) programs, anticipating at least one provider to open this fall – more specifics will be discussed at the next meeting
* Code and rate changes for ABA – the code changes bring MassHealth coding into alignment with other providers – public hearing was in July, and this will go into effect 10/1/22
* Autism waiver – added capacity to the 1915C Autism waiver in HCBS ARPA spending plan, anticipated to start early 2023
* Provided funding to add an Extension for Community Health Outcomes (ECHO), Autism Model to MCPAP for ASD to enhance MCI response and to support providers treating in new Community Behavioral Health Centers

Ms. Kain presented updates from MRC

***MRC***

* MRC proposes to implement a variety of projects (Under the Enabling Members Technology pillar for ARPA) to ensure access to and improved proficiency in the use of a wide range of enabling technologies for individuals with disabilities and their families across the Commonwealth. Goals are to increase independence and reduce isolation among individuals with disabilities.
* The projects will provide Assistive Technology (AT) devices as well as the associated AT services that are often needed to ensure successful us of the technology
* Services will include training for the MRC consumer and their family member who would be of support to the consumer
* Families can access Respite Services which allows for families and other natural supports to ensure the individuals they care for are well-taken care of when they need time to look after their own needs

The next meeting for the Autism Commission is scheduled for December 15th and members will be provided with a draft annual report – an additional meeting will be scheduled for January/February to approve the draft annual report which is due on March 1st, 2023. Ms. Kain will be asking agencies for updates on data.

Commissioner Ryder asked for a motion to end the meeting, Ms. Ginnis moved the motion and Ms. Reale seconded the motion. All members were in favor. With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned.