



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services

**Assisting Individuals with Autism
and other Intellectual
or Developmental Disabilities**

DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES

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Autism Study



- The Autism Commission was established in 2010 by the Legislature and consists of 31 members appointed by the Governor.
- It's charge was to make an investigation and study relative to individuals with autistic spectrum disorders, which shall include, but not be limited to Asperger's syndrome, high functioning autism and pervasive development disorder and study the range of services and supports necessary for individuals to achieve their full potential across their lifespan.
- To identify gaps and make recommendations for strategies that will support the development of appropriate, collaborative and timely supports and services across the lifespan of individuals on the spectrum
- To do this, the Commission focused on best practices, increased coordination among state agencies and maximization of federal reimbursement and other resources and approaches that can better serve individuals on the spectrum and their families.



Autism Study (cont.)



The Commission investigated issues including, but not limited to:

- Coordination of state human service agencies
- Issues related to access for families of children with autism spectrum disorders and adults who are from linguistically and culturally diverse communities
- Provision of adult human services
- Behavioral services based on best practices to ensure emotional well-being
- Mental health services
- Public education
- Mechanisms to ensure maximization of federal reimbursement
- Post-secondary education
- Job attainment and employment, including supported employment
- Housing
- Independent living
- Community participation
- Social and recreational opportunities



AUTISM COMMISSION PRIORITIES



- 1. Expand eligibility criteria for the Department of Developmental Services so that individuals with autism who have IQs over 70 and have substantial functional limitations have access to services.
- 2. Assure that those with autism and a co-occurring mental health condition have equal access to and appropriate services from the Department of Mental Health.
- 3. Expand intensive services in the home and community for individuals with autism through the Children's Autism Medicaid Waiver, the Adult Medicaid Waivers, and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education/Department of Developmental Services Residential Placement Prevention Program.
- 4. Expand insurance coverage for autism treatments.
- 5. Increase and fortify supports and resources that make it possible to maintain the family unit and assist individuals with autism to live in the community.
- 6. Determine the number of people with autism in Massachusetts and their support needs by implementing a plan for consistent statewide data collection.



AUTISM COMMISSION PRIORITIES (cont.)



- 7. Improve access to autism screening, diagnosis, and Autism Specialty Services through Early Intervention for children diagnosed with autism and those considered at high risk for autism.
- 8. Increase employment opportunities for individuals with autism by providing a range of job training, job development, and employment opportunities.
- 9. Increase capacity to provide educational supports and services necessary to meet the needs of all students with autism.
- 10. Increase availability of augmentative and alternative communication methods, devices and services for individuals with autism.
- 11. Increase the range of housing options for individuals with autism.
- 12. Improve the delivery of healthcare services for individuals with autism.
- 13. Assure that the Autism Commission's Recommendations are implemented and outcomes are monitored for effectiveness



In August of 2014, Governor Patrick signed into law three bills which reflect a transformative evolution of the DDS service delivery in Massachusetts.

- **Real Lives** - creates a self-determination statute for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- **Autism Omnibus** - expands the opportunity to many who need supports and services delivery in Massachusetts.
- **National Criminal Background Check** - makes available access to a national database while checking the backgrounds of those hired to work directly with people served by DDS.



Autism Commission



- Establishes autism commission as a permanent entity responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Commission's recommendations.
- 34 members including 2 House and 2 Senate members, representatives from various agencies, autism organizations, and other human service related organizations.
- Provides for an Executive Director to be appointed by the Commission.
- The Commission shall make recommendations and monitor the implementation of policies impacting individuals with autism spectrum disorders.
- The Commission shall meet at least quarterly and shall file an annual report on or before March 1 with the Governor and the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and people with Disabilities and the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing. The report shall include recommendations for regulatory and legislative actions necessary to provide or improve services or supports.



Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE)



- Similar to the “529” education savings accounts
- Establishes state tax-advantaged accounts for families to utilize for services for disabled family members.
- Administered by Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority (MEFA)
- Funding would help cover disability- related expenses, enabling parents of children with disabilities, as well as older individuals with disabilities, to put aside money to help cover anticipated long-term costs.
- Savings could be used for education, medical and dental care, job training, housing, transportation, financial management, home improvements, funeral and burial expenses, and other uses.
- Contributions to the account would grow tax-free; withdrawals for qualified disability expenses would be tax-free.
- MEFA would file an annual report regarding how the accounts are being used.
- MEFA will promulgate regulations on or before December 31, 2014.



Autism Endorsement



- Requires the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to revise educator licensure regulations to provide a mechanism for special education teachers to receive an Autism Endorsement. The Board shall promulgate regulations specifying the subject matter knowledge, skills, and competencies required for such endorsement.
- Special education teachers will gain the skills needed to support general education teachers and to provide the specifically designed instruction needed to meet the educational needs of students with autism in the least restrictive environment.
- Provides for teachers who have previously been employed serving primarily students with autism, to receive an autism endorsement subject to demonstrating the required knowledge, skills, and competencies.
- School districts are not required to employ teachers with an Autism Endorsement, and teacher preparation programs are not required to launch Autism Endorsement training programs.



Special Commission - Employment



- Establishes a Special Commission to make an investigation and study of employment training and employment opportunities for persons with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)
- Special Commission shall consist of 15 members, including 2 members of the Senate and 2 members of the House, as well as representatives of appropriate agencies and autism organizations.
- The Commission shall determine the current status of employment training and employment opportunities, including vocational training programs for teenager and young adults with ASD. The Commission will make recommendations for providing employment training and employment opportunities for the population of residents of the Commonwealth diagnosed with ASD.
- The Commission shall report to the Legislature the results of its investigation and study and its recommendations by June 30. 2015.



Mental Health Services



The Department of Developmental Services and the Department of Mental Health shall establish and implement a plan to provide services to individuals who have both a mental illness and a developmental disability and are also eligible for services from both the DDS and DMH.

When developing the plan, the departments shall consider :

- Ways to facilitate communication between the departments
- Protocols to determine which services shall be provided by which department
- Ways to ensure that an individual who is eligible for services from both departments receives all services for which an individual is eligible.
- The plan may include an interagency agreement

The Departments shall jointly file a report on the plan to the Legislature no later than December 31, 2015



Special Commission/ Housing Needs



- Establishes a Special Commission to make an investigation and study of the present, and future, statewide affordable supportive housing needs for the Commonwealth's population of persons with autism spectrum disorder (ASD.)
- Special Commission shall consist of 15 members, including 2 members of the Senate and 2 members of the House, as well as representatives of appropriate agencies and autism organizations.
- The Commission shall develop a statewide housing survey to determine the current status of affordable housing stock for adults with ASD and shall make recommendations. The Commission will review the rise in prevalence of ASD diagnoses, and shall make estimates of the number of children, aged 21 or younger with ASD to estimate the future need for affordable supportive housing. The Commission will recommend a plan-of-action to address need for housing.
- The Commission shall report to the Legislature the results of its investigation and study and its recommendations by June 30, 2015.



DDS Eligibility



- #1 Priority of Autism Commission
- The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) will no longer use an IQ-based eligibility for those diagnosed with Autism, Prader-Willi Syndrome and Smith-Magenis Syndrome
- Previously many individuals with autism who did not meet the IQ criteria required for DDS eligibility for services but had significant functioning limitations (self care issues, mobility, unable to live independently, learning issues) were not eligible for DDS services.
- Maintains IQ and Functional limitations criteria for those with an ID diagnosis.
- Changes the age of adult eligibility from its current 18 years of age to 22 years of age to mirror the end of special education in Massachusetts.
- Estimated 1st year costs to DDS: \$5 Million first year start up costs for services. DDS Infrastructure Costs for additional personnel - first year \$468k; est. \$1.8 million annually the second year out.



DDS Service Needs



- By implementing the statutory eligibility criteria DDS will increase the number of individuals found eligible.
- It is expected that a large number of these individuals will be on the Autism Spectrum and a very small percentage will also have Prader-Willi syndrome and SMS.
- The projected first year service budget at \$5.0m is targeted to provide support to individuals living at home with their family or those who are able to live more independently in the community.
- The Department expects to begin to serve individuals utilizing a service package that may include day/employment support, individual support, transportation and family support, a broad category of services and assistance to families.
- At this time, it is not possible to project the number of individuals who will seek or be made eligible for services in FY'15.
- During the initial 12-18 months, the Department will gather information on the number of individuals determined to be eligible with designation of their specific disability.
- This information will be used as the basis for better determining the amount of resources needed in subsequent years.



Infrastructure Needs



- The proposed eligibility criteria will increase the number of individuals found eligible for DDS.
- This will require an increase in the staff needed to determine eligibility and address service needs.
- All new staff positions will be hired on a staggered basis during year 1

Position
Intake/Eligibility Specialists
Area Office Service Coordinators
Licensed Psychologists
General Counsel
Program Coordinator III (contracts)
Clinical Consultation & Training Needs