

Texas Autism Council  
2018 Report to the Executive Commissioner

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Abstract

The purpose of this report is to briefly summarize the state of ASD-related services in the state of Texas, with a focus on those services provided by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission. The report will focus on successful iterations of service programs, emphasizing what it looks like when those services work best. The report will also provide recommendations for how to increase the number of successful outcomes for individuals with ASD and their families within each program's service delivery model, and ways to address limitations that impact the ability of families to access successful or supportive service environments. The report draws on the experiences of professionals and families in order to provide a detailed and specific account of several successful and challenging circumstances encountered by people with autism their families and the professionals who serve them around Texas. The overarching goal of the report is to provide multiple examples of positive situations reflecting the best practices within the service provision models of HHSC.

Introduction

*Charge of the Counsel:* The Texas Autism Council has been charged to summarize and make recommendations to the Commissioner of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission about issues related to autism and the provision of services to people with autism and their families. The goal of this report is to provide a brief summary of the services available to individuals with autism and their families across Texas, to identify areas of success within those services, and to provide a vision for ways in which those services can best be structured and funded within the state to maximize the benefit to the most people with autism and their families as possible.

Due to the increasing prevalence of ASD, the recent reorganization of THHSC, and the diverse number and type of services provided by THHSC, it is important that the Texas Autism Council carefully consider the unique that also cumulative impact of those changes and services on people with autism across the state. The goal is to identify where this diversity of services and models is working best while also identifying ways that efficiencies can be found to better maximize the impact of the available resources.

*ASD in Texas:* The prevalence of autism is increasing, and there are more children, adolescents, and adults with autism in Texas than ever before. Those individuals and their families are also accessing state services available to them more than ever –putting additional burden on an already stretched support system. Autism represents the fastest growing disability category in the country, and that trend is also observed in Texas. From early childhood intervention through to adult services, individuals with autism are requiring more supports and resources than ever before. **Summarize TX numbers here...**

There is currently an urgent shortage of services and access to resources for children with autism in the state of Texas. Fewer than 10% of children with autism receive services before entering school. The average age of first diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders is six. This means that the majority of children with autism are not identified nor do they receive services during the critical early developmental phases of their life -during which the maximum impact of intervention can be seen.

Successful autism intervention involves comprehensive intensive lifelong support. Early identification and intervention can drastically reduce the cost of support for someone with autism across their life. Studies suggest that effective early identification, diagnosis, and treatment can save anywhere from 1 1/2 to \$2 million per child across their life. Therefore the ultimate goal of the state is to maximize benefit for individuals while minimizing the cost of resources and burden on the state. Any approach to successful intervention in autism must emphasize both early verification and effective early treatment for the symptoms of autism.

The increasing number of people with autism has put a strain on state resources, while at the same time providing a unique opportunity to explore ways to better serve a growing population through THHSC services. THHSC provides a number of powerful and important supports and services to individuals with autism and their families.

*Goals of report:* This report will move beyond the summary of the state of autism in Texas to provide specific, concrete stories of success and of challenge for families and professionals dealing with autism in the state of Texas. Each story will highlight what's working best, while also recognizing what can work better. It is hoped that positive, solution-focused recommendations will allow THHSC and the Texas legislature to make the best decisions possible in their designation of resources for the design and delivery of services for people with autism in the state. Each of the following sections will summarize the services offered within specific branches of THHSC. For each service delivery program, we describe a story of success. We also make recommendations for ways to extend and grow that success. In addition, several stories of overarching interagency or across organization cooperation will be provided as a means of providing a concrete example of what the ultimate best practice in autism.

## Specific Programs and Success Stories

### **For Each Program:**

**Current stats as known**

**What it looks like when it works (Success Story)**

What challenges impede more success?

What can we do to increase success –efficiencies, recommendations, etc.?

Across Programs:

Both family and professional perspectives will be represented in the stories and in the recommendations. It is important to consider both what individuals with ASD and their families need, but also to address the barriers professionals face in trying to provide services and secure state support as providers in order to increase professional capacity in the state.

Conclusion:

Each of the stories of success described above occurred because service providers, families, and professionals came together to address unique needs within existing systems.

Two primary conclusions can be drawn from successful programs:

First the most successful programs allow families and providers the most flexibility to make decisions in the unique situation. Autism spectrum disorder is characterized by unique expression of symptoms across each individual. Therefore the needs of individuals with autism are complex and often different than each other. There is no cookie-cutter treatment for ASD. Therefore, programs like the Children's Autism Program and others that show the most consistent affect are often those that allow the service delivery to be individualized to the child. Service delivery models that allow flexibility allowed the experts to apply that expertise in situations that are culturally, educationally, and community sensitive.

Second, successful programs are interdisciplinary in practice. Because of the pervasive impact of autism symptomology in the lives of people suffering on the spectrum, intervention can rarely be successfully implemented by one professional at a time. Programs that utilize the expertise of a variety of professionals, including: applied behavior analysts, school psychologists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, parents, teachers, physicians, counselors, and social workers have the ability to address the needs of people with autism in effective ways that cannot often be achieved in the absence of multiple professional perspectives.

Flexibility and interdisciplinary practice define successful outcomes in autism spectrum disorders. When designing the next generation of the dimensions and supports for children with autism state of Texas, it is highly recommended priority be given to those programs which can demonstrate not only individual flexibility programming but also involve the presence and influence of multiple professionals in service provision.

A third conclusion to be drawn from the stories is that there continues to be a deficit of available services. The majority of children & individuals with autism in Texas do not receive adequate services. While successful service delivery models are powerful and present across the state and across the services described above, the majority of individuals in the state of Texas still do not receive access to adequate support or protection. It is critical that the state of Texas increase both the funding for and the diversity of programs for people with autism across the state, and that efforts are made to increase awareness of and enrollment in programs currently provided.

Continue development of conclusions guided by specific family and professional input as stories are integrated into the report.

Summary:

Briefly restate goals, objectives, conclusions, and recommendations.

Appendixes:

Provide relevant summary documents (references, websites, state reports, etc.) to provide context for success stories and recommendations