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Key Education Issues in Review: Autism Spectrum Disorders

UNLV College of Education

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Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability affecting 1 in 68 children in the United States. Individuals with ASD struggle with communication, behavioral, and social skills. The demands of addressing ASD present a significant challenge to Nevada; however, the challenges associated with inaction are much higher. Lack of access is the most critical issue facing families today. Without treatment, most individuals with ASD will require high levels of support throughout their lives at a high cost to families and society.

Nevada's Facts and Statistics

- Nevada Early Intervention Services diagnosed 127 children with ASD in fiscal year 2014.
- 6,217 children between 3 and 22 years are identified as having ASD by the Nevada Department of Education (NDE).
- These numbers do not include adults over 22, as there are not adequate data systems to monitor that population.
- As of December 2014, the Autism Treatment Assistance Program is currently serving 428 children, but its waitlist is over 400.
- An estimated 709 children with ASD will graduate from high school between 2015 and 2020. A majority of these young adults will require life-long services.
- An additional 1,883 children with ASD will graduate high school between 2021 and 2025.

U.S. Facts and Statistics

- The Centers for Disease Control estimates autism prevalence at 1 in 68 children.
- Current prevalence represents a 30% increase over 2012.
- Parent-reported ASD in school age children is as high as 1 in 50.
- ASD is five times more likely to affect boys than girls.

Nevada's Recent Actions To Date

- Passage of AB 162, which requires insurance policies to offer coverage for ASD services.
- Passage of SB 359, which requires early intervention to perform screening for ASD as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- Passage of AB 316 and AB 345, which established the Autism Treatment Assistance Program within Nevada's Aging and Disability Services Division.

Considerations for Future Directions

ASD presents a pressing and growing challenge for Nevada. While there are many issues and interests to be taken into account, a targeted and pragmatic approach to addressing the needs of individuals with ASD will produce the greatest benefit. This approach should ideally focus on five initiatives:

- Ensure accurate screening and assessment of young children.
- Provide immediate access to appropriately intensive, evidence-based intervention services.
- Increase the number of qualified professionals serving Nevadans with ASD.
- Reduce financial barriers to treatment by maximizing access to Medicaid and private insurance funding to offset state program funding.
- Create a state-level office to coordinate and streamline access to services across the life span.

Statewide Benefits of Future Action

- Earlier identification and treatment will improve outcomes for children and families.
- Access to early, intensive intervention will reduce long term costs to families and society.
- Building workforce capacity will reduce long waitlists for treatment.
- Streamlining access to services through a state-level office will facilitate timely transition between agencies as a child's needs change.
- Improving services statewide will enable Nevada to recruit and retain highly qualified professionals.

Implications of Status Quo

- Average age of diagnosis will continue to exceed the national average.
- Delayed diagnosis delays access to treatment.
- Delayed treatment will produce poor outcomes for children and reduced quality of life for families.
- Nevada will continue to have long waitlists for treatment.
- The state will experience high costs to families and society for life long care.

Selected Resources

- Centers for Disease Control. (2014). Autism Information Center. Atlanta, GA: National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, Division of Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities. Retrieved from: http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/index.html
  Provides information about screening/diagnosis, treatments, data and statistics, free materials, and research.

- Behavior Analyst Certification Board. (2014). BACB Guidelines: Health Plan Coverage of Applied Behavior Analysis Treatment for Autism Spectrum Disorder. Retrieved from: http://bacb.com/Downloadfiles/ABA_Guidelines_for_ASD.pdf

- Association for Science in Autism Treatment (n.d.). Learn More About Specific Treatments. Retrieved from: http://www.asatonline.org/for-parents/learn-more-about-specific-treatments
  Provides information about levels of evidence for many popular treatments for ASD, including Applied Behavior Analysis.

UNLV Contacts for Additional Information/Background

This summary represents a portion of work and research from faculty members in the UNLV College of Education. For more information or to receive a copy of a comprehensive paper on this topic, please contact:

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