Supporting the Massachusetts Autism Community During COVID-19 Through Advocacy

May 13, 2020
our mission

Autism Speaks is dedicated to promoting solutions, across the spectrum and throughout the life span, for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. We do this through advocacy and support; increasing understanding and acceptance of people with autism; and advancing research into causes and better interventions for autism spectrum disorder and related conditions.
Autism Speaks does not provide medical or legal advice or services. Rather, Autism Speaks provides general information about autism as a service to the community. The information provided in this email is not a recommendation, referral or endorsement of any resource, therapeutic method, or service provider and does not replace the advice of medical, legal or educational professionals. Autism Speaks has not validated and is not responsible for any information or services provided by third parties. You are urged to use independent judgment and request references when considering any resource associated with the provision of services related to autism.
Challenges the Autism Community is Facing

- Abrupt discontinuation of educational services
- Closure of day programming
- Closure of clinics
- Shift to telehealth
- Mental health supports for parents
- Lack of connection to community opportunities and supports
- Severe disruption of community employment
- Discontinuation of respite relief for families
- Disruption of much-needed routines
- Loss of income for families
- Challenging behaviors
- Access to healthcare with appropriate supports
Contact our Autism Response Team

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How to contact ART

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1-888-AUTISM2 (1-888-288-4762)
En Español: 1-888-772-9050
help@autismspeaks.org
Agenda

Welcome
- Jill Precopio, Executive Director New England Chapter

Federal Advocacy Update
- David Sitcovsky, Senior Director Policy and Federal Government Affairs

State Advocacy Update
- Judith Ursitti, Director State Government Affairs

Community Outreach
- Ginny Green, Director Community Outreach
Federal Advocacy Response
Federal COVID Legislation – What’s Passed

**MARCH 6: COVID 1**

**Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations**
Provides $8.3 billion in emergency funding for federal agencies to respond to the coronavirus outbreak

**MARCH 18: COVID 2**

**Families First Coronavirus Response Act**
- Provides emergency paid sick and family leave
  - DOL has provided Q&A regarding these provisions of the law
- Tax credits
- Free COVID-19 testing (where available)
- Expands food assistance and unemployment benefits
- Increases Medicaid funding

**MARCH 27: COVID 3**

**Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act**
Provides $2 trillion in funding for provisions, including:
- Economic impact payments to most Americans
- Increased unemployment benefits
- Hundreds of billions of dollars to address the public health response
- Assistance for small businesses and other employers to retain employees and keep their businesses operating
- Billions of dollars for schools
- Extends the Money Follows the Person program through November
Federal COVID Legislation – What’s Passed

APRIL 24: COVID 3.5
Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act

Interim bill to replenish small business assistance program and address other issues:

• Limited scope to address Paycheck Protection Program and funding for hospitals and testing.
Our advocacy priorities during the COVID crisis

- Additional funding for home and community-based services (HCBS)
- Additional funding to meet the educational needs of students with autism
- Protecting the rights of students under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and other laws
- Expanded access to telehealth services for health care needs
- Eligibility for $500 economic impact payments for dependents over age 17
- According caregivers of adults with disabilities the same emergency paid sick and family medical leave policies accorded caregivers of children
- Preventing discrimination in treatment decisions and care allocation based on disability

Congressmen Chris Smith (R-NJ) and Mike Doyle (D-PA), co-chairs of the Congressional Autism Caucus, have sent letters to congressional leadership advocating for many of these priorities.
What’s next?

• COVID 4 – negotiations ongoing

• Yesterday, House Democrats introduced The Heroes Act – a $3 trillion relief package.

• Priorities that are included in The Heroes Act:
  • Substantial increase in funding for HCBS
  • $100 billion for education (in addition to $1 trillion in general assistance for state and local governments)
  • Dependents over 17 retroactively eligible for economic impact payments. Eligible for additional $1,200 payments in Heroes Act.
  • Clarifies eligibility for emergency paid sick and family leave for caregivers of adults with disabilities
  • $10 million for DD Act activities

• House scheduled to vote on Friday. From there, path is unclear…
Impact

Autism Speaks is enhancing lives today and accelerating a spectrum of solutions for tomorrow.

HEALTHCARE

HOME AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES

SPECIAL EDUCATION/EARLY INTERVENTION
HEALTHCARE

Massachusetts was approved for an 1135 emergency waiver on March 26, 2020 by CMS, the federal Medicaid agency. This allows for a great deal of flexibility related to MassHealth authorizations/benefits including the ability to:

- Temporarily suspend Medicaid fee-for-service prior authorization requirements
- Extend pre-existing authorizations
- Suspend Pre-Admission Screening and Annual Resident Review
- Modify Timelines for State Fair Hearing Requests and Appeals
- Modify Provider Enrollment Requirements
- Allow Provision of Services in Alternative Settings

Additional information can be found here.
Telehealth Services

- States have broad flexibility to cover telehealth through Medicaid /MassHealth, including the methods of communication (such as telephonic, video technology commonly available on smart phones and other devices) to use.
- Telehealth is important not just for people who are unable to go to the doctor, but also for when it is not advisable to go in person. No federal approval is needed for state Medicaid programs to reimburse providers for telehealth services in the same manner or at the same rate that states pay for face-to-face services.
Telehealth Services

- Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker executed an order to expand access to telehealth services and protect healthcare providers.
- It states that all commercial insurers, self-insured plans, and the Group Insurance Commission must cover medically necessary telehealth services. (GIC administers health insurance and benefits for state employees and retirees.)
- The order specifies that all payers in the state “are required to allow all in-network providers to deliver clinically appropriate, medically necessary covered services to members via telehealth.”
Telehealth Services

Services the autism community could potentially access via telehealth include but are not limited to:

- Behavioral health treatments, including applied behavior analysis
- Therapeutic services, including speech therapy, occupational therapy and physical therapy
- Psychological and psychiatric care
HOME AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES (DDS Waivers)
The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is providing emergency flexibilities for Home and Community Based Waiver Services through Appendix K

Massachusetts’s Appendix K Application was approved by CMS on April 29, 2020 (Additional information here)

Some of these flexibilities include:

• Raise maximum age in Children’s ASD waiver through age 9 and increase individual prospective budget limit and step-down budget. Waive limits on individual services for all services with an individual limit.

• Allow waiver day services to be provided in participants’ homes including in group home settings.

• Allow all waiver services, including respite, to be provided to participants residing in alternative settings such as hotels, shelters, or residential schools as well as out-of-state settings.

• Allow delay of completion of annual LOC re-evaluations and allow LOC assessments to be conducted via electronic methods, (telephone/video.)

• Temporarily include retainer payments for Day Habilitation Supplement services.

• Add home-delivered meals, medical supplies, equipment and appliances (over and above that which is in the state plan) and assistive technology.
The United States Department of Education (USED) has stated that during this national emergency “school districts must provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) consistent with the need to protect the health and safety of students with disabilities and those individuals providing education, specialized instruction, and related services to these students.” DESE recognizes that these unprecedented circumstances may affect how all educational and related services and supports are provided. While USED and DESE will offer flexibility where possible, USED has emphasized many disability-related modifications and services may be effectively provided remotely or online.
Special Education/Early Intervention

The state of Massachusetts is receiving funds from the COVID-3 stimulus package through the Education Stabilization Fund.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segment</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tr>
<td>K-12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-secondary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Governor’s Discretionary</td>
<td>$51.9 million</td>
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It is critical that advocacy occur so that Massachusetts students with autism receive appropriate supports and services, including but not limited to:

- Hardware, software, communication devices, and other assistive technology
- Appropriate transition from early intervention to special education
- Services not received during the time of school closures and remote learning
- Appropriate transition out of special education to adulthood
Connect with us!

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Follow our advocacy profiles

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| @AutismVotes
| @AutismVotes
COVID-19 Information and Resources

These are particularly challenging times for the autism community:

• Disrupted routines, changes in access to services and the uncertainty is taxing for people with autism and their families.

• Parents and caregivers are taking on roles of teacher, service provider and therapists.

• Adults with autism are cut off from services face loss of jobs.

• Autism Speaks is making resources and support available to help our community weather this storm. We are in this together.
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Information and Resources

• **Dealing with School Closures**

• **How to handle clinical care during social distancing and school/program closures**

• **What should the autism community know about the coronavirus outbreak?**

• Visit our [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) channels, where we will regularly share the ideas we’re hearing from throughout the community. For local information, join an [Autism Speaks Facebook Group](#) in your area.

• NEW April 9 - Autism Certification Center (ACC) and Autism Speaks are teaming up to make 30+ hours of [online video learning resources](#) available at no cost for the autism community.
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Information and Resources

Information by Topic

Autism Speaks is committed to providing the autism community with resources to meet each person and family's unique needs throughout every stage of life. To help with your search for support, we have organized our resources, information, expert advice and personal stories by category.

Financial Planning | Safety | School | Technology
Health and Wellness | Behavioral Challenges | Medical Resources | Transition to Adulthood
Adults | Family Support | Community Life | Miscellaneous
Thank You