



Autism Task Force 2008 Annual Report

The increasing number of children and adults diagnosed with ASD is a growing and urgent concern for families, service providers, and policy-makers, as the nation's existing health, education, and social service systems struggle to respond to the needs of this population in a comprehensive manner. Continued research is needed to document trends in the growth of ASD, as well as research into and development of effective interventions. In addition, greater commitments are needed to expand access to services such as early identification, diagnosis, early intervention, education, family support, and long-term services and supports to better meet the needs of individuals with ASD and related developmental disabilities. This includes providing additional funding for Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part C Infants and Toddler program and Section 619 Preschool Grants. Moreover, many insurers severely limit or entirely deny benefits for applied behavior analysis and other effective, evidence-based interventions that can better the lives of people with ASD.

The CCD Autism Task Force continued to advocate for the fully authorized appropriations levels to implement the Combating Autism Act. Both the House and Senate FY 09 appropriations bills to date would provide full funding for the CAA; however, the FY 09 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education funding bill has not yet been finalized.

The Task Force continued to work with other advocates to educate members of Congress about the Expanding the Promise for Individuals with Autism Act. This bill (S. 937) was introduced in 2007 by Senators Hillary Clinton (D-NY) and Wayne Allard (R-CO). A companion bill (H.R. 1881) was introduced in the House by Representatives Mike Doyle (D-PA) and Chris Smith (R-NJ), co-chairs of the Autism Caucus. CCD will work with House and Senate sponsors to reintroduce this bill early in the first session of the 111th Congress. With the elections over, it is hoped that we can develop more bipartisan support and achieve significant movement in the coming year.

CCD also monitored and contributed to other bills related to autism spectrum disorders such as the Empowering Children with Autism through Education Act and the Helping Hands Act.

The Task Force also provided input into CCD's recommendations to the new Administration and the 111th Congress. Following are the recommendations that the task force will be working on in the coming year:

- Provide full funding for all parts of the Combating Autism Act and significantly increase funding to the NIH, CDC and HRSA autism research budget over the next four years.
- Provide additional funding for Part C Infants and Toddlers Program and Part B of IDEA to meet the growing needs of children with ASD as early as possible.
- Amend the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 and the Public Health Service Act to require insurance coverage for ASD interventions.
- Support legislation that will enable people with disabilities and their families to save for life needs on a tax-advantaged basis and without fear of losing existing federal benefits.
- Champion legislation to increase the availability of evidence-based services and interventions for individuals with autism across the lifespan by funding direct service, information dissemination, and interdisciplinary professional training activities.
- Provide funding for a National Autism Family Information and Resource Center to assist families of people with autism find services that are appropriate to their family member.

In addition to the above recommendations, CCD will continue to monitor all legislation for its impact on individuals and families with autism spectrum disorders.

Autism Task Force Co-Chairs in 2008:

- Kim Musheno, Association of University Centers on Disabilities
- Katy Neas, Easter Seals