



MISSISSIPPI
AUTISM
ADVISORY
COMMITTEE

2023
ANNUAL
REPORT

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Dear Legislators,

The Mississippi Autism Advisory Committee (MAAC) respectfully submits this year's report to the Mississippi Legislature, detailing our findings and recommendations for the 2024 legislative session. In this report, we are highlighting disparities in the adult autistic community in our state.

After committee discussions and concerns from families around the state, the Intellectual Disabilities/Developmental Disabilities Waiver (ID/DD) waiting list was identified as a pressing issue. Our committee believes that Mississippi needs to have a separate ASD adult waiver for the autistic community in our state.

This recommendation is not new for MAAC. It was first addressed in 2012, when the incidence rate of autism was 1:88. Today, the autism incidence is 1:36^a, and thus creating a separate waiver makes good public policy for this growing and aging autistic population in our state. Autistic adults in need of long-term services and support spend years on waiting lists before receiving such services through Medicaid. The published data suggests that the majority waiting have unmet needs for functional skills services, employment or vocation services, and mental and behavioral health services.

The second recommendation is for increased Medicaid rates for the following psychiatric codes: 90791, 96130, and 96131. Autism used to be considered a childhood condition, a public misnomer. In 2013, this was rectified in the 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) and changed to include an adult diagnosis of autism. In MS, many of these suspected undiagnosed autistic adults cannot be properly referred to service agencies for support without the proper diagnosis. A recent study by the National Institute of Mental Health found that Medicaid data shows wide differences in mental health care across the country. In Mississippi, we have an access issue that is preventing these suspected autistic adults from seeking formal diagnoses since not all listed Medicaid providers are accepting new patients.

On behalf of autistic people, their families, and the professionals who work with them, the Mississippi Autism Advisory Committee stands ready to assist in the implementation of these recommendations.

Sincerely,

Kristie Speights
Chairperson

Lynda Balfour
Co-Chair

Kristi Herrin
Co-Chair

^a Centers of Disease Control and Prevention. Prevalence and Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder Among Children Aged 8 Years – Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, 11 Sites, United States, 2016. Available online: https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/ss6904a1.htm?s_cid=ss6904q1_w

ANNUAL REPORT

Our Beginning

The Mississippi Autism Advisory Committee (MAAC) was created by House Bill 1125 (2011 Regular Session) as the Legislature recognized an urgent need for strategies on how to best identify, treat, educate, accommodate and employ people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and assist their families.

Our Mission

The MAAC's mission is "to study, make recommendations and develop a strategic plan on how best to educate and train students with ASD to maximize their potential productivity within the workforce... and to develop an annual plan" outlining these strategies. MAAC is tasked with writing a report to the legislature outlining any roadblocks to creating meaningful progress in the areas of mental health, education medical, and employment for people with ASD and their families.

MAAC met six times this year. Based on these meetings and testimonies received, the committee has chosen to focus this report on the included strategic recommendations set forth.

Committee Recommendations

The 2023 MAAC has approved two (2) recommendations to present to the Mississippi Legislature for consideration:

Recommendation #1

MAAC recommends that legislators establish an Autism Waiver for the adult population designed to provide autism-targeted, long-term, community-based, person-centered, supports and therapeutic services for adults aged 18 years and older. This waiver will enable adults with ASD to participate in their community including having jobs and will enable home and community living as they age as an alternative to institutional care.

Rationale For Recommendation #1- Autism Waiver

At present, there are 11 states with autism waivers. Currently, the Mississippi ASD population is grouped under the ID/DD waiver, and there are a total of 2,829 individuals of varying disabilities on the planning (waiting) list with an approximately 10-year wait. There are roughly 779 ASD people on this waiver's planning/waiting list that could be removed if an autism waiver was available. This would reduce wait times for all waiver applicants greatly. The ASD population would also be able to receive autism specific services as opposed to general disability ones. The purpose of the ID/DD Waiver is to prevent institutionalization of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities by providing person-centered in-home services, employment services, residential services, and day programming. Serving people in their homes and communities helps them maintain important relationships and make a meaningful contribution to their communities. However, people with ASD have specialized needs that require specialized services. The committee recommends a waiver that is operated by a State Autism Coordinator and Support Coordinators who have specialized training and experience with the needs of the autistic population. An Autism Waiver would

allow the ASD population to receive autism-specific services as opposed to services that are designed to serve a more generalized population.

As of now, the ID/DD waiver is costing on average \$54,000/per year, per participant with 20 percent of this coming from the state. Having an autism waiver, with supports targeted specifically to this population, would help keep them in their communities being active participants, working, living meaningful lives and contributing to society not being institutionalized.

Recommendation #2

The MAAC recommends that legislators increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for the following psychiatric codes: 90791, 96130, and 96131.

Rationale For Recommendation #2 – Medicaid Rate Reimbursement Rate Increase

A recent study found Medicaid data shows wide differences in mental health care across the country. Mississippi currently ranks 42nd in access to mental health care. In Mississippi, there is a provider access issue that is preventing suspected autistic adults from seeking formal diagnosis. Mississippi Medicaid's website has mental healthcare providers; however, many are not accepting new clients or the information for providers is not accurate. At the present time, the TK Martin Center in Starkville, is the only state academic institution that provides autism evaluation to adults with Medicaid coverage.

Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) has an autism program coordinator that helps diagnosed autistic adults seek employment during this transition. In fiscal year 2023, this program served 711 autistic adults. Many of these undiagnosed adults seeking services had an educational diagnosis of autism throughout their formative school years. The lack of an autism medical diagnosis becomes problematic when these individuals transition from the school system and face the service cliff, which is the loss of school services.

By increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates for 90791, 96130, and 96131 will incentivize providers to accept Medicaid clients and create a pathway for undiagnosed autistic adults to get a formal medical diagnosis.

Mississippi Medicaid rates

90791 Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation \$132.48
 96130 Psychological testing evaluation/ First hour \$94.48
 96131 Psychological testing evaluation/ additional hour \$67.37

Neighboring State comparison

Louisiana rates

90791 Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation MD \$108.39
 90791 Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation APRN/CNS/PA \$75.87

Louisiana rates

90791 Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation MEDICAL PSYCHOLOGIST \$86.71
 90791 Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation PSYCHOLOGIST \$86.71
 90791 Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation LCSW \$75.87
 96130 Psychological testing evaluation/ First hour MD \$68.14
 96131 Psychological testing evaluation/ additional hour MD \$60.84

Arkansas rates

90791 Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation \$114.43
 96130 Psychological testing evaluation/ First hour \$81.49
 96131 Psychological testing evaluation/ additional hour \$81.49

Texas rates

90791 Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation \$138.46
 96130 Psychological testing evaluation/ First hour \$88.21
 96131 Psychological testing evaluation/ additional hour \$84.52

Georgia rates

90791 Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation \$128.24
 96130 Psychological testing evaluation/ First hour \$100.88
 96131 Psychological testing evaluation/ additional hour \$76.71

¹ <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/news/science-news/2023/medicaid-data-show-wide-differences-in-mental-health-care-in-the-united-states>

² <https://mhanational.org/sites/default/files/2023-State-of-Mental-Health-in-America-Report.pdf>

³ https://www.lamedicaid.com/Provweb1/fee_schedules/SBH_FS_11-30-2022.pdf

⁴ <https://humanservices.arkansas.gov/wp-content/uploads/OBHS-fees.pdf>

⁵ <https://public.tmhp.com/FeeSchedules/OnlineFeeLookup/FeeScheduleSearch.aspx>

What is Autism?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability. Some people on the autism spectrum have a known difference, such as a genetic condition. Other causes are not yet known. Scientists believe there are multiple causes of ASD that act together to change the most common ways people develop. We still have much to learn about these causes and how they impact people on the autism spectrum.¹⁰

Autism is a complex neurobehavioral disorder characterized by impairment in reciprocal social interaction, impairment in communication, and the presence of repetitive and stereotypic patterns of behaviors, interests, and activities. The onset of symptoms is typically before the age of 3 years. The severity of impairment in the given domains as well as the pattern of impairments varies from individual to individual; that is why diagnosticians refer to a “spectrum” of disability. Impairment in social interaction range from difficulty initiating and maintaining interaction, impaired ability to recognize and experience socially acceptable emotions, and difficulty processing and appreciating the thoughts and feelings of others. Communication deficits range from no useful form of communication to very advanced language abilities, but little ability to use language in a social manner. Repetitive and stereotypic behaviors include perseverative behaviors such as complex rituals, extreme difficulty adapting to change and transition, and unusual movements such as hand flapping, tapping, clapping or whirling (known as Stimming).

The DSM-5-TR (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition, Text Revision) outlines specific criteria for the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The ASD diagnosis is based on the core symptoms of “persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities.”

People on the autism spectrum may behave, communicate, interact, and learn in ways that are different from most other people. There is often nothing about how they look that sets them apart from other people. The abilities of people on the autism spectrum can vary significantly. For example, some may have advanced conversation skills, whereas others may be nonverbal. Some may need a lot of help in their daily lives; others can work and live with little to no support.

ASD begins before the age of 3 years and can last throughout a person’s life, although symptoms may improve over time. Some children show ASD symptoms within the first 12 months of life. In others, symptoms may not show up until 24 months of age or later. Some gain new skills and meet developmental milestones until around 18 to 24 months of age, and then they stop gaining new skills or lose the skills they once had.

As children on the autism spectrum become adolescents and young adults, they may have difficulties developing and maintaining friendships, communicating with peers and adults, or understanding what behaviors are expected in school or on the job. They may come to the attention of healthcare providers and other professionals because they also have comorbidities such as anxiety, depression, or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, which occur more often in people with ASD than in people without ASD.

Chart 1 provides an overview of the increase in Autism Prevalence as identified by the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network.

Chart 1. Identified Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder ADDM Network 2014-2020 Combining Data from all Sites¹⁰

Surveillance Year	Birth Year	# of ADDM sites reporting	Prevalence per 1,000 children (range)	This is 1 in X children diagnosed
2016	2008	11	18.5 (18.0 – 19.1)	1 in 54
2018	2010	11	23.0 (16.5 – 38.9)	1 in 44
2020	2012	11	27.6 (23.1 – 44.9)	1 in 36

Prevalence of Autism and Related Data:

- Based on the National Survey of Children’s Health (2019 – 2020), it is estimated that approximately 13,482 children (ages 3 -17) are currently diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), which makes up 2.3% of our childhood population.¹¹
- ASD now affects 1 in 36 children.¹²
- ASD is the fourth most prevalent diagnosis in children age 3 – 17.¹³
- 70% of children with ASD have at least one comorbid developmental or psychiatric condition.¹⁴

¹⁰ <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>

¹¹ <https://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=5383&r=26>

¹² <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>

¹³ <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/data.html>

¹⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24074734>

History of Mississippi Legislative Actions Related to Autism

The following section contains a non-exhaustive list of recent actions taken by the Mississippi Legislature concerning Autism Spectrum Disorder.

2007 – HB 1267 – Caring for Mississippi Individuals with Autism Task Force

During the 2007 session the Mississippi Legislature passed HB 1267¹⁵ establishing the Caring for Mississippi Individuals with Autism Task Force. This task force submitted their report in December 2007 containing recommendations related to work force training, medical treatment, early intervention, educational practices, and infrastructure changes.

2011 – HB 1125 – Mississippi Autism Advisory Committee

MAAC was created in the 2011 regular session as the Legislature recognized an urgent need for strategies on how to best identify, treat, educate, accommodate and employ people with ASD and assist their families.¹⁶

2014 – HB 542 State and School Employees Health Insurance Management Board Task Force

HB 542¹⁷ requires the State and School Employees Health Insurance Management board to review and study “whether to expand coverage currently provided for the treatment of autism spectrum disorders under the State and School Employees Health Insurance Plan.”

2015 – HB 885 – Autism Insurance Coverage Requirement

During the 2015 session of the Mississippi Legislature, House Bill 885¹⁸ was passed and signed into law by the Governor. This bill requires most health insurance policies to cover screening, diagnosis, and treatment of ASD up to age 8 and also to provide the regulatory framework for the licensure and regulation of the practice of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), a profession providing empirically based treatment beneficial to people diagnosed with ASD.

2016 – 2020 – No Legislative Actions

2021 – SB 2799 – Medicaid Reimbursement Rates Freeze

In accordance with the Mississippi Code Section 43-13-117 (D), as amended by the Senate Bill 2799¹⁹ during the 2021 Legislative Session, the Mississippi Division of Medicaid (DOM) will freeze all Provider reimbursement rates at the levels in effect on July 1 of this year. The rate freeze will remain in effect until the Legislature authorizes rates adjustments.²⁰

2022 – HB 656 – Delete Freeze on Medicaid Reimbursement Rates

To delete the provision that prohibits The Division of Medicaid’s Rates of Reimbursement, Services, Charges and Fees from being increased, decreased or otherwise changed unless they are authorized by an amendment to this section by the legislature. House Bill 656 was signed by Governor Tate Reeves on April 18, 2022.

¹⁵ <https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2007/pdf/HB/1200-1299/HB1267SG.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2011/pdf/HB/1100-1199/HB1125SG.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2014/pdf/HB/0500-0599/HB0542SG.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2015/pdf/HB/0800-0899/HB0885SG.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://Medicaid.ms.gov/Medicaid-reimbursement-rate-freeze-to-take-effect-July-1-2021>

²⁰ <https://legiscan.com/MS/bill/HB657/2022>

Recent Autism Related Medicaid Reform Efforts:

2019 – Mississippi Division of Medicaid Amendment to State Plan Autism Spectrum Disorder

State Plan Amendment (SPA) 19-001²¹ Targeted Case Management (TCM) for Beneficiaries with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities (IDD) in Community-Based Settings, with a proposed effective date of January 1, 2019, has been approved by the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services. The SPA includes the following changes:

- Adding Autism Spectrum Disorder as a covered diagnosis
- Removing the needs-based criteria
- Revising the qualifications and training requirements for Targeted Case Managers

2018 – Mississippi Division of Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services Waiver Renewal

In 2018 the Mississippi Division of Medicaid revised their home and community-based waiver program. This program furnishes an array of home and community-based services that assist Medicaid beneficiaries to live in the community including access to in-home supports, community respite, job discovery, transition assistance day services, and shared supported living

2018 – SB 2095 Authored by Tollison, Parks, Gollot, and Blackwell

In 2018, during regular session, SB 2095 was referred to Insurance; Appropriations on January 4, 2018, for review and vote. This Senate Bill 2095 was an act to amend section 83-9-26, Mississippi Code of 1972, to remove the age limitation on the requirement that health insurance policies provide coverage for Autism-Related treatment. This SB 2095 Died in Committee on January 30, 2018.²²

****Through a Grass Roots Movement, “Lift the Cap” sponsored by parents and families of autistic individuals, and with the support of Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann and Insurance Commissioner Mike Chaney, three Mississippi insurance companies voluntarily agreed to lift the age limit cap on coverage of ABA therapy for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder. “Although the state’s three biggest insurers (MS Blue Cross Blue Shield, Magnolia Health, and UnitedHealth) have all agreed to lift the cap, the cap technically remains in place, as part of the state legislation code. Lifting it statewide, and requiring all insurers to comply will likely require legislation.”²³***

2023 – Mississippi Division of Medicaid increased rates

In April 2023, Drew Snyder, Director of Medicaid announced an increase of the reimbursement rates for the therapy codes specific to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The rate increase came after meeting with the chair and co-chairs from the MAAC (Mississippi Autism Advisory Committee) in March 2022, from months of pressure applied by Lt. Governor Hosemann and Senator Blackwell, along with compelling testimonies from MAAC committee members and family members in the Medicaid Committee Hearing held December 1, 2022.

²¹ <https://medicaid.ms.gov/spa-19-0001-targeted-case-management-tcm-for-beneficiaries-with-intellectual-and-or-developmental-disabilities-idd-in-community-based-settings/>

²² <https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/2018/pdf/history/SB/SB2095.xml>

²³ <https://www.mississippitoday.org/2018/01/16/lives-changed-after-insurers-lift-cap-on-autism-services/>

Autism Related Insurance Report

Chart 2 provides an overview of the Community Mental Health Service fee schedule that is used to properly identify and diagnosis adults with Autism.

Chart 2. Mississippi Medicaid Fee Schedule for Community Mental Health Services

Code	Short Description	PA Required	Min Age	Max Age	Begin Date	End Date	Max Units	Fee
90791	Psych diagnostic Evaluation	No	0	999	07/01/2020	12/31/9999	1	\$132.48
96130	Psycl test eval phys/qhp 1st	No	0	999	07/01/2020	12/31/9999	1	\$94.48
96131	Psycl test eval phys/qhp each	No	0	999	07/01/2020	12/31/2299	7	\$67.37

Individuals with a diagnosis of Autism currently on the ID/DD Planning/Wait list for services.

Chart 3 provides a representation of the 779 individuals with a diagnosis of Autism that are currently on the ID/DD Planning/Wait list to receive services. They can wait up to 10 years before receiving ID/DD benefits.

*Children below the age of 10 that qualify for EPSDT services must exhaust all benefits from the state plan prior to enrolling into the ID/DD waiver.

Chart 3. ID/DD Waiver Autistic recipients by age provided by Mississippi Division of Medicaid

Age	Number Served
10-20 years old	71
21-35 years old	395
36-45 years old	188
46-55 years old	81
56-75 years old	44

Chart 4 provides a representation of the individuals in Mississippi with a diagnosis of Autism that are currently on the WAITLIST to receive services from the ID/DD Waiver. These individuals can wait in an excess of 10+ years before receiving benefits of the ID/DD Waiver.

Chart 4. ID/DD Waiver WAITLIST for Autistic individuals by age provided by the Mississippi Division of Medicaid

Age	Number on Waitlist
1-10	265
11-20	760
21-30	1,047
31-40	358
41-50	191
51-60	134
60+	110

Statement of Need for Autism Waiver:

As the staggering waitlist numbers suggest, the families we serve continuously report the extreme worry and concerns for their aging child with autism (while the parents/caregivers are also aging). Without a specific waiver that addresses the needs of the aging, autistic population, parents/caregivers are often required to step out of the workforce to care for their aging child/young adult with the diagnosis of autism. The cost of raising a child with Autism is significantly more expensive than raising a child without a neurodevelopmental disability. Additionally, the economic loss increases when the parent/caregiver has to remove themselves from work to meet their child's/young adult's needs. This coupled alongside the autistic individual who is unable to work adds an economic impact for Mississippi that will result in billions of dollars of loss over time (see previous MAAC reports).

Appendix A

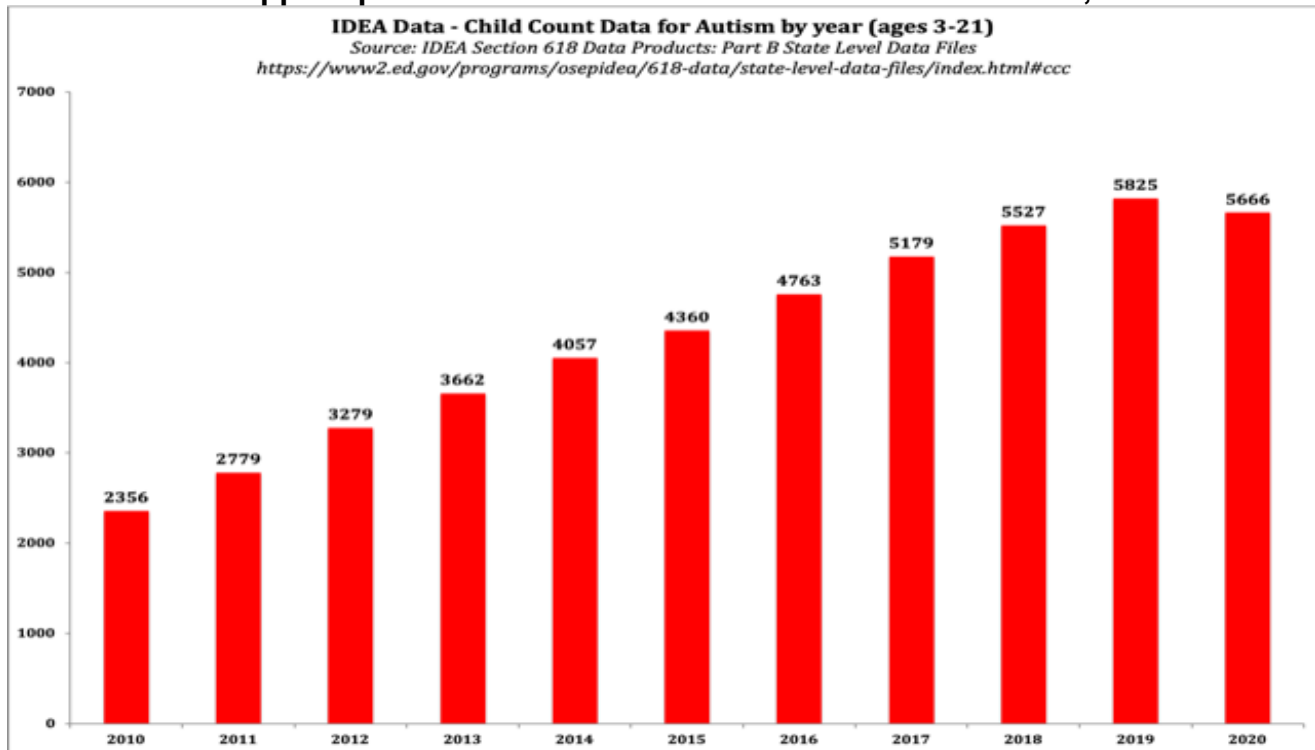
Key Findings on ASD Services Provided by Mississippi State Agencies

The following section provides key findings on the services provided by major state agencies in Mississippi that work with and provide services to our increasing population of people with ASD and their families.

Mississippi Department of Education Report

- The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) identified 5,666 children, ages 3 – 21, with the educational disability ruling of Autism (AU) as of November 1, 2020.

Chart 5. Mississippi Department of Education Autism Child Count Data, 2010 - 2020



Mississippi Department of Mental Health Report

- The true number of people with ASD in Mississippi being served remains unclear as only one state agency – the Mississippi Department of Education tracts this population and only for children ages three (3) to twenty-one (21), who have the primary educational disability ruling of Autism (AU).
- In FY 2022, the Department of Mental Health reports the total number of children and youth served with Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED) under age 18 is 23,547. The total number served age, 18-21 with SED is 3,853. In FY 2023, the Department of Mental Health reports the total number of children and youth served with SED under age 18 is 23,968. The total number served ages 18-21 with SED is 3,243. The numbers of children and youth with SED and ASD diagnosis are unknown.
- The Autism Training Initiative began in 2012 and is designed to build capacity in Mississippi to provide evidence-based, lifespan services and supports based on the premise that people with autism are included in all settings. Since February 2014, sixty-five (65) Autism Foundations trainings have been offered throughout the entire state with over 2,750 attendees through June 2021.
- The Department of Mental Health sponsors and partners with the Mississippi Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities and with the Mississippi Statewide Autism Training Initiative holds the: ***Creating Your Own Path: Successful Transitions for Persons with Autism*** conference annually. Continuing education credits are provided for many credentialed professionals, such as teachers, social workers, nursing home administrators, and DMH credentials.
 - The Eighth (8th) Annual Conference featured Raun Kaufman, former CEO of the Autism Treatment Center of America, as the keynote speaker was held on September 8, 2022. A total of 117 participants attended.
 - The Ninth (9th) Annual Autism Conference featuring keynote speakers Anthony Ianni and Jeffrey Mathews was held on September 7 and 8, 2023. A total of 146 participants in attendance.

Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services – Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Report

State vocational rehabilitation agencies are one of the most important sources of employment services for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other disabilities. The following Chart identifies the number of individuals with ASD that the office of Vocational Rehabilitation served from FY 2015 until May 2023:

Chart 6. Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Served FY 2015 – May 2023

Fiscal Year	Number Served	Funds Spent
2016	240	\$525,843
2017	253	\$526,779
2018	254	\$517,675
2019	400	\$1,000,317
2020	604	\$1,634,156
2021	628	\$2,304,569
2022	635	\$3,193,415
2023	707	\$4,326,337

Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS), Office of Vocational Rehabilitation has a program specialist assigned to Autism whose duties include:

- Providing field staff updated information regarding ASD.
- Coordinating training for field staff on matters related to ASD.
- Coordinating services provided for individuals with ASD through private organizations.
- Working with Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors who are requesting other services for clients with ASD.
- Working closely with the Supported Employment Program Specialist regarding individuals with ASD by participating in Personal Care Planning meetings along with VR Counselor, client and family.
- Collaborating with VR Counselors and assisting in identifying services needed for individuals with ASD to assist with obtaining and maintaining competitive integrated employment.

Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation recognizes the importance of emphasizing the strengths and contributions that many of the clients with ASD can offer businesses. Individual characteristics such as punctuality, attention to details, consistency, reliability, or good visual-spatial or mechanical skills can make these individuals more attractive to employers. Vocational Rehabilitation counselors utilize different tools in seeking employment options for clients with ASD; they include but are not limited to:

- Person-Centered Planning: where an action plan is developed to provide directions in employment by identifying client desires, dreams, and employment goals.
- Customized Employment: includes discovery, profile portfolio, resume, and negotiation with employers and job placement.
- Project SEARCH Program: The Project SEARCH program is a unique, business led, one-year employment preparation program that prepares young people with developmental disabilities for competitive, integrated employment through total workplace immersion. The program provides real-life work experience combined with training in employability and independent-living skills to assist young people with developmental disabilities make a successful transition into adult life. MDRS partners with a school district and a host business to facilitate this program. There are currently twenty-two (22) Project SEARCH sites across the state. One hundred forty-one (141) individuals with disabilities have graduated from Project SEARCH Mississippi since Project SEARCH UMMC launched in August 2018. Ninety-seven (97) of those individuals have gained employment. The job search continues for graduates. Two (2) new adult sites will begin in the fall of 2023.

Through the Transition and Youth Career Services program, the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services assists qualified individuals with disabilities including those diagnosed with ASD from 14 – 24 years of age make the transition to a successful future. When an individual is in school, the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor works cooperatively with the Mississippi Department of Education and local school districts to help plan and implement pre-employment transition services. Vocational Rehabilitation Transition and Youth Counselors can begin providing Pre-ETS services to student as early as age fourteen (14). Pre-employment Transition Services may include:

- Job Exploration Counseling
- Workplace Readiness Training
- Work-Based Learning Experiences
- Counseling on Post-Secondary Education and Training Opportunities
- Instruction in Self-Advocacy

Institutions of Higher Learning Report

Mississippi State University:

- Mississippi State University's Applied Behavior Analysis program is a Verified Course Sequence that covers all the required course work that meets the Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) requirements for credentialing as a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA). Mississippi State University just had its first graduating class in May 2022 of eleven (11) students receiving a Master's Degree in Applied Behavior Analysis. Ten (10) of the eleven (11) graduates plan to stay in Mississippi to practice but not all have secured job contracts to date. Mississippi State University offers a Verified Course Sequence that covers all the required course work for certification of Rehabilitative Behavioral Technicians (RBT).
- Mississippi State University is offering opportunities for graduate assistantships (100% waived tuition and monthly stipend), as well as scholarships, along with covering the cost of examination preparation to assist students studying for their BCBA test and pay for students to attend the state's ABA BAAMS (Behavior Analysis Association of Mississippi) Conference.

University of Mississippi:

- University of Mississippi's Applied Behavior Analysis program is a Verified Course Sequence that covers all the required course work that meets the Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) requirements for credentialing as a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA).

Holmes Community College, Goodman, MS:

- Holmes Community College is the first community college in the nation to establish coursework (Applied Behavior Analysis) for Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) Certification.

Pearl River Community College, Hattiesburg, MS:

- In March 2022, Pearl River Community College, Hattiesburg campus became the state's second community college to offer course work for Registered Behavioral Technician (RBT) Certification. Educators located in PRCC's six county districts are offered the course for free. The first class enrolled consisted of twenty-six (26) educators within the PRCC area.

The Mississippi Autism Board Report

The Mississippi Autism Board consists of five (5) members appointed by the Governor and Lieutenant Governor. The board consists of one (1) licensed psychologist practicing in the area of applied behavior analysis, three (3) licensed behavior analysts, and one (1) non-licensed public member who is the family member of a recipient of applied behavior analysis services to provide for the licensure and regulation of the practice of applied behavior analysis.

The Board's duties include, but are not limited to:

- Investigating and evaluating applications for individuals seeking licensure to practice applied behavior analysis
- Investigating allegations or practices potentially violating applicable law concerning the practice of applied behavior analysis
- Adopting and revising, as necessary, rules and regulations related to the licensure and practice of applied behavior analysis.
- The Mississippi Autism Board was established by the 2015 Mississippi Legislature under House Bill 885.

The Mississippi Autism Board that provides the licensure and regulation of Applied Behavior Analysis in Mississippi has at the present time, 220 active Licensed Behavior Analysts.

The Mississippi Autism Board met six (6) times and administered oral Jurisprudence Examination six (6) times. There are currently two hundred and twenty (220) Licensed Behavior Analysts, and there were thirty-seven (37) Licensed Analysts licensed in FY/23. There are currently eleven (11) Assistant Behavior Analysts, and one (1) was licensed in FY/23. There were eighteen (18) Temporary Licenses issued to those awaiting the next opportunity to take the Oral Jurisprudence Exam. Eleven (11) existing licenses were renewed. There are currently fourteen (14) applications for licensure pending as of June 30, 2023. There were three hundred and eighty-one (381) registrations for Registered Behavior Technicians processed during FY/23 and there are currently four hundred and forty-three (443) active Registered Behavior Technicians certified to work with Licensed Behavior Analysts.

Committee Membership by Appointment

We would like to thank the following Mississippi Autism Advisory Committee Members (2021-2023) for their time and commitment to creating this Annual Report to present to our Legislators:

Member - Representing:	Appointed By:
Melody Madaris – Parent of Autistic Child	Governor
Kristie Speights – Parent of Autistic Child	Governor
Kristin Lape – Employer of Autistic Individuals and Parent of Special Needs Child	Governor
Lynda Balfour – Parent of Autistic Child	Lieutenant Governor
Kristi Herrin – Parent of Autistic Child	Lieutenant Governor
CC Bradberry – Parent of Autistic Child	Speaker of the House
Jennifer Griffin – Parent of Autistic Child	Speaker of the House
Dr. Jennifer Boykin – State Superintendent of Education	Superintendent of Department of Education
Ms. Gail Stuart – Transition Coordinator	Superintendent of State Department of Education
Shelia Brown – MS Special Education Advisory Committee	Superintendent of State Department of Education
Dr. Jennifer Wallace – MS Special Education Advisory Committee	Superintendent of State Department of Education
Ms. Rana Mitchell – Member of a Governing Body in a School District	Superintendent of State Department of Education
Dr. Sheila Anthony – Director of Special Education in School District	Superintendent of State Department of Education
Ms. Laura Hines – Educator Working Directly with ASD Students	Superintendent of State Department of Education
Dr. Kasee Stratton-Gadke – T.K. Martin Center for Technology and Disability	Director of the T.K. Martin Center
Dr. Carlen Henington – MS Licensed School Psychologist Providing Evaluation	Mississippi Association of Psychologists in the Schools (MAPS)
Antario S. Knight – MS Licensed School Psychologist Providing Evaluation	President of the Mississippi Association of Psychologists in the Schools (MAPS)
Dr. Jennifer Jackson – Representative of MS Department of Rehabilitation Services	Executive Director of the Department of Rehabilitation Services
Mr. Craig Kittrell –Mississippi Department of Mental Health	Executive Director of the Department of Mental Health
Mr. Charles Hughes – Autism Advocacy Group/Professional	Executive Director of the Department of Mental Health
Dr. Kristin Merritte – Autism Advocacy Group/Professional	Executive Director of the Department of Mental Health

Dr. Christopher Furlow – Private Mental Health Providing ASD Services	Executive Director of the Department of Mental Health
Ms. Elizabeth Burklow – Licensed Speech Therapist	President of MS Speech Language Hearing Association (MSHA)
Ms. Hannah Sanders – Licensed Speech Therapist	President of MS Speech Language Hearing Association (MSHA)
Ms. Amanda Harlow-Felder – Representative of the MS Department of Insurance	Commissioner of Insurance
Ms. Pam Dollar – Executive Director	Mississippi Parent Training and Information Center
Dr. Courtney Walker – UMMC Dept of Pediatrics ASD Provider	Vice Chancellor of the University of MS Medical Center
Ms. Gail Smith – Department of Human Services	Executive Director of the Department of Human Services