

**Regional Autism Assistance Program
Expert Panel Meeting
March 11, 2025, 9 AM – 11 PM
Via Zoom**

Name	Organization/Role Representing	Attended
Megan Abramski	Division of Aging and Disability Services, Iowa Department of Health and Human Services	X
Alyson Beytien	Beyond Behavior, Family Member	X
Josh Cobbs	Autism Speaks, Family Member	
Rose Cartee	Iowa Department of Education	
Samantha Cermak	ChildServe	
Amy Chebuhar	Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, Family Member	X
Vanessa Curtis	Child Health Specialty Clinics, Division of Child and Community Health, University of Iowa Stead Family Pediatrics	X
Allison Drew	Regional Autism Assistance Program, Family Member	X
Erin Enyart	Autism Society of Iowa, Family Member	X
Kristin Hanson	Axis Therapy Centers	X
Erika Hertel	Regional Autism Assistance Program, Family Member	X
Andrea Keith	Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services	X
Monica Kurtz	Grant Wood Area Education Agency	X
Caroline Moniza	Mercy Family Counseling	
Steve Muller	Balance Autism	
Kelly Pelzel	ChildServe	X
Jillian Reiher	Center for Disabilities and Development, University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital	X
Wendy Trotter	Iowa Department of Education	
Maria Valdovinos	Drake University	X
Brad Zelinger	Stride Autism Centers	X

Welcome (Facilitator: Erika Hertel)

Welcome, Introductions

Announcements

- Guest speaker: Director Larry Johnson, Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, needs to be at the Capitol this morning and won't be able to join us. We will see if he is available to speak at our next meeting.
- We have some member retirements: Vanessa Kimm retired in December and Michele Holst is retiring in April.
- Leslie Rogers, ChildServe, has stepped down from the Panel due to her new position, with Samantha Cermack and Kelly Pelzel continuing to represent ChildServe.
- Rose Cartee has taken on Wendy Trotter's previous role with the Iowa Department of Education and will be joining the Panel. Wendy will continue for now.

Member Updates, Iowa's Autism Strategic Plan Progress

- Regional Autism Assistance Program (RAP), Erika Hertel, Allison Drew
 - This fiscal year (started July 1) RAP has served 3,103 families
 - During the period of July 1-December 31 RAP has had 529 new referrals
 - Autism Basics started March 4 (English version)
 - Free four-week webinar series aimed at parents/primary caregivers of children with a new autism diagnosis
 - Presented by Jillian Reiher, PhD
 - Anyone welcome to attend
 - foster parent training credit is available for live sessions
 - 121 registered
 - Spanish Autism Basics Webinar series scheduled to start on May 6, weekly for four weeks, Wednesdays at noon with Jillian Reiher, PhD and Dayrin Lovan presenting
- Autism Society of Iowa, Erin Enyart
 - Several upcoming webinars, spreading them out throughout the year instead of only in April
 - Virtual conference on Friday April 3rd- Autism in Popular Culture
 - Presenting on how autism has been portrayed in various tv shows in movies in comparison to reality
 - Kelly Pelzel shares brief background about the presenters, some out of state and some local with various experiences
 - [2026 Spring Virtual Conference: "From Representation to Reality: Autism and Popular Culture" – Autism Society of Iowa](#)
- ChildServe, Kelly Pelzel
 - Des Moines location is set to open soon, possibly the end of April
 - Taking referrals for all services now
 - Larger property
 - Can serve around 600 children, but will start with around 60 and build up from there
 - Programs offered at this location are medical childcare, autism day program, Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), mental health services, occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech therapy
 - ChildServe is experiencing challenges with the new payor requirement related to autism diagnosis and access to ABA
 - Erika asks if ChildServe's ABA program is still mostly internal referrals
 - Brad asks if Kelly can share about the capacity in their clinics offering ABA
 - Kelly reached out to Leslie Rogers at ChildServe, who indicates that they are currently accepting external referrals for ABA at all locations, but there is a lengthy waitlist, with the exception of Ames. Ames has more capacity, but also no immediate openings.

- Drake University, Maria Valdovinos
 - Board of Behavioral Health Professionals is working on each profession within that board having practice standards
 - Committee is currently working on practice standards for Behavior Analysts within the state of Iowa
 - Hopes it provides assistance some of the barriers with insurance coverage/denials
 - Focus groups looking at behavioral crisis within Emergency Departments
 - Has not yet run any Caregiver focus groups
 - Still recruiting
 - Instead of doing these focus groups in person, they have been moved to Zoom
 - Compensating participants \$50
 - Only has funds through April, if anyone knows people that have had experience with individuals they support with autism/intellectual disability, asking what their experience was like within emergency departments.
 - Scheduling Tuesdays 6-8 PM or Fridays 9-11 AM
- Grant Wood Area Education Agency (AEA), Monica Kurtz
 - Three staff on Autism team at Grant Wood
 - All professional learning has to be submitted and approved through the Department of Education
 - The only two training courses approved currently are:
 - Three-day structured TEACH class, offering in April and June
 - Recently approved is Peer to Peer class
 - Teaches school staff how to foster friendships in an inclusive manner in the classroom
 - Offering in the fall
 - A couple of classes to resubmit regarding working with neurodivergent students in an education setting
 - AEA staff submits training for approval
 - Materials already approved are what any AEA within the state is required to use going forward
- Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, Amy Chebuhar
 - Title V program is shifting to more focus on medical homes
- Center for Disabilities and Development (CDD), University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital, Jillian Reiher
 - Staffing changes
 - Jacqueline Klossing, PhD leaving the CDD
 - Mark Thomas, PhD current post-doctoral fellow staying as staff
 - CDD does have a new post-doctoral fellow for next year
 - Added providers to Autism Diagnostic teams, new medical providers are interested in being involved
- Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS), Andrea Keith
 - New administrator Brandy McOmber has been with IVRS and has various experiences within the organization
 - Since shift from Regions to Disability Access Points there has been some confusion about who is funding supported employment between IVRS and Waivers/Medicaid
 - Some things have been put on hold regarding supported employment payments
 - Director of HHS and Director of IVRS are planning to meet soon. They are working on a mutual agreement
- Stride Autism Center, Brad Zellinger
 - Opening West Des Moines location in May
 - Opening second Sioux City location in June/July
 - Managing a lot of changes and challenges with Medicaid

- Division of Aging and Disability Services, Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, Megan Abramski
 - Updated website: <https://hhs.iowa.gov/health-prevention/disability-services/autism-support-program>
 - Updated applications are available on the website, fillable format or can be printed
 - Direct parents interested in the program to website as it has the most up to date information and form
 - If the old form is completed, they will have to redo their application on the new form
 - Still have a waiting list, a few have dropped off either because they had Medicaid or no longer wanted services
 - Reaching out to individuals on the waiting list
 - They have 30 days to respond
 - ASP reaches out by email and phone as much as they can to get in contact with that parent
 - Three members have responded, one did not respond within 30 days
 - Can reapply in six months
- Beyond Behavior, Alyson Beytein
 - Opening a new ABA clinic in Waverly this month, accepting new clients
 - Signed a lease to open a clinic in Lake View
 - Enough clients on wait list in Carroll to start services
 - Started first two adult clients with ABA
 - Very different programming
- Axis Therapy Center, Kristin Hanson
 - In Ames they have two new SLPs starting in June
 - taking new clients for all services (ABA, Speech and OT)
 - Ankeny location moving to bigger building this fall
 - Clear Lake clinic opened in December
 - Hiring more technicians
 - Taking new clients for ABA
 - ABA only currently
 - Recruiting for Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) and Occupational Therapist (OT)
 - Fort Dodge is currently looking to hire another Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) and actively recruiting SLP and OT
 - possibly have SLP starting late summer/early fall
 - Urbandale location has a new SLP starting in June
 - Immediate openings for ABA
 - Short waitlist for speech and OT
 - West Des Moines location had a new SLP start last month and a new OT will start in May
 - Immediate openings for ABA
 - Taking new clients for speech and OT, short waitlist
 - Hoping to add more locations later this year
 - Continually hiring for all positions for all locations
 - Axis has been going into schools to provide ABA training to staff, paraprofessionals in particular.
 - Axis has also been contracting with school districts to be able to provide ABA therapy at school due to many families having transportation barriers, going well
 - Has had several meetings at State Capitol and soon traveling to DC to meet with Senators regarding 2026 legislative priorities

Legislative Updates, Erin Enyart, Autism Society of Iowa

- House passed HF2716 which included the SNAP changes and Work Without Worry Amendment
 - Some negative parts to the bill along with positive With Work Without Worry
- SF2422 moved out of subcommittee yesterday

- Alot of parents were at the Capitol talking about challenges with MCOs
- This Bill would put Iowa's Medicaid system all through MCOs
- Kristin shares priorities she is advocating for in DC
 - Increased reimbursement rates for ABA, Speech and Occupational Therapies
 - Stable reimbursement is essential to supporting provider participation
 - Expanding access to ABA with Hawki coverage
 - Continually getting referrals for families that have Hawki, or they get switched to Hawki and the MCO states nothing will change
 - Return SLP income rules to per increment billing
 - Starting December 2025, Medicaid moved from per increment billing (every 15 minutes) to single daily rate which significantly cut provider payment for longer sessions
 - Increased denials for treatment authorizations from MCOs
 - Through Council of Autism Service Providers (CASP), a survey was sent to providers across Iowa to get data showing results of MCO denials in the last six months compared to the previous six-month period
 - Families having to decrease or put services on hold
 - Getting Behavior Analysts recognized in Department of Labor
 - Currently it does not separate out Behavior Analysts in their occupational designations
 - By not having them listed, they are limited in the statistical information about supply/demand, growth in the field
 - Would help business owners evaluate wage compensations, etc.
 - Including Behavior Analysts in the Iowa Mental Health Professionals Loan Repayment Program.
 - Shortage of licensed behavior analysts, especially in more rural areas
 - Behavior analysts being included in this program could strengthen the behavioral health workforce
 - Maria Valdovinos provides input that this statute currently limits who is considered a mental health provider; they need to change the definition on who is a mental health provider, and to possibly pivot to get changes in statute in regard to the definition
 - Continue to talk about proposal for Speech-Language Pathology Assistant (SLPA) licensure in Iowa
 - Currently lack a licensure pathway for speech language pathology assistants
 - Able to use OT assistants to provide OT, Registered Behavior Technicians (RBT) can provide direct service under a BCBA, with the lengthy speech waitlist SLPA having licensure to be recognized by Medicaid for reimbursement would help fill that gap

Discussion

- Erika shares about challenges that have come up with families regarding Hawki
 - One provider has been telling families that Hawki is now covering ABA under Iowa Total Care
 - Erika reached out to them to discuss that this had not gone through yet as it was originally sent out in a newsletter
 - In additional conversation provider stated they could check people's benefits and that Hawki was covering
 - Erika also shares about experience with families that had started ABA because they were told it was authorized, but they had Hawki and later received a large bill as it didn't cover
 - Brad shares Stride has experienced this and had a similar issue with Hawki in the past
 - Alyson has had similar experience and tells all families Hawki does not cover

- Families being told by MCO it is covered
 - There may be some confusion with law that states ABA is covered through private insurance
 - Several families have been moved to Hawki and were not aware
 - Alyson clarifies new SLP new billing changes
 - Kristin now shares it is limited to pay for only 15 minutes of service
 - ChildServe offers twice a week for half an hour due to billing issues
 - Kristin encourage parents to file grievances with MCOs
 - Kristin has a list of what to do and will share with the Panel
 - More impactful coming from members
- Erika asked about private insurance challenges or if it is primarily MCOs
 - Kristin shares it is primarily MCOs
 - Jillian asked if challenges include Tricare, limited clinics accept
 - Axis accepts Tricare
 - Stride is working on accepting it
 - Kristin shares there are several limitations and billing challenges, but it is doable
 - Erika shares if anyone has issues with private insurance, she has contacts with U.S. Department of Labor that could help
 - Erin Enyart asks who families can contact if they have these issues.
 - She has been putting them in contact with a lobbyist at Autism Speaks, but hasn't heard updates
 - It was suggested they continue to contact their legislators
- Erika asks if anyone is aware if there is a good resource for helping families choose a quality ABA program
 - Family Navigators are sharing concerns that some families have reported challenges with providers
 - A handout would be a helpful resource for families
 - Brad shares a blog from Stride <https://stridecenters.com/blog/how-to-choose-the-right-aba-program-for-your-child/>
 - Maria shares that as their committee starts working on the practice standards, one thing that was discussed was creating an accessible handout sharing what to look for in ABA providers
 - Jillian shares there is one in the diagnostic folder that CDD hands out
 - Kelly Pelzel has old Autism Basics slides related to intervention
 - Kristin created a reel on social media recently on this topic

Meeting adjourned at 10:00 AM.