

Regional Autism Assistance Program
Expert Panel Meeting
6/10/2026, 9 AM – 11 AM
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	X
Rose Cartee	Iowa Department of Education	X
Samantha Cermak	ChildServe	X
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
Autumn McKeel	Emergent Learning Clinic	X
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	
Jodie Warth	Balance Autism	X
Brad Zelinger	Stride Autism Centers	X

Welcome (Facilitator: Erika Hertel)
Introduction

Announcements

New members: Rose Cartee, Iowa Department of Education; Autumn McKeel, Emergent Learning Clinic, co-chair of IOWA ABA legislative committee; and Jodie Warth, Balance Autism.

Guest speaker: Larry Johnson, Director, Iowa Department of Health and Human Services

Governor Kim Reynolds appointed Larry Johnson, Jr., as the director of the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in October 2025.

Prior to his appointment as HHS Director, Johnson served almost 15 years in State government, serving as the Director of the State's largest regulatory agency (Department of Inspections, Appeals and Licensing), as the State public defender and legal counsel to the Governor. Before state government, he practiced administrative law in private practice.

Johnson received his law degree from Creighton University School of Law and his Bachelor of Science in management from Purdue University's Mitch Daniels School of Business.

Update

- Disability Access Points (DAP)
 - Local entities providing:
 - Information, referrals, planning assistance.
 - Connection to both short-term and long-term support.
 - Ongoing check-ins to ensure that needs are met.
 - 4 agencies covering 7 districts statewide.
 - Disability Service System redesign launched in July 2025 alongside the Behavioral Health Service System (Aging and Disability Resource Centers, ARDC)
 - Easier for elderly and individuals with disabilities to find services and support.
 - Work with different partners across the state to ensure people get the right help.
 - No wrong door model, people can get help no matter where they start.
 - Transitioned 2500 individuals from the regions to DAPs
 - Warm hand-offs to case managers to ensure continuity of care.
 - Efforts have allowed resources to focus on providing individuals with disabilities and their parents with information, assistance and options counseling.
 - Serves approximately 1200 people per month.
- Programs and supports offered.
 - Information/Assistance
 - Guided conversations and follow up.
 - Options counseling
 - Person-centered guidance, interviews, planning and decision-making follow up.
 - Short-term services and support (STSS)
 - Up to 90 days of practical assistance to help individuals live independently.
 - Long-term services and support (LTSS)
 - Includes facility-based care options like ICFID, skilled nursing and medical supplies.
 - Independent living program
 - Provided through Statewide Independent Living Counsel (SILC) and Centers for Independent Living (CIL).
 - Employment supports
 - Focused on competitive, integrative employment through employment first initiatives.
 - Targeted case management (Medicaid FFS)

- Help coordinate community care plans.
- Autism Support Program
 - State funding for ABA services for eligible children under 14.
- Olmstead Plan
 - Ensures integrated living, work, education.
 - Statewide plan updated January 2026.
- Centers for Independent Living (CILs)
 - Partnerships with Iowa HHS ADRC to expand independence across the state.
 - Goals are consumer control, peer support, self-help, self-determination, equal access and individual systems advocacy.
 - Promote full integration and community inclusion.
 - Mandatory core services provided:
 - Information referral services.
 - Independent Living Skills Training.
 - Peer counseling.
 - Individual and systems advocacy.
 - Transition assistance.
 - Operated by individuals with disabilities.
 - Supported by DAPs.
- Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)
 - Governor appointed non-profit council tasked with amplifying the voices of Iowans with disabilities, strengthening networks and embracing full inclusion.
 - Coordinate independent living council.
 - Develop the tri-annual state plan for independent living.
 - Host quarterly council meetings.
 - Next one scheduled July 16th.
 - Public involvement opportunities.
 - Deliver essential independent living services and leadership oversight, strategic planning and advocacy.
 - DAPS assists people in unserved counties.
- A lot of work going on in department.
 - Modernizing IT system.
 - One of the largest projects is Healthy Hometowns.
 - Last year congress passed \$50 billion to go to improving rural healthcare access.
 - Iowa applied for \$1 Billion over 5 years and received more funding in the first year than requested.
 - \$209 million in the first year.
 - First state in the nation to be distributing this money.
 - Healthy Hometowns: [Healthy Hometowns - Iowa's Rural Health Transformation Plan | Health & Human Services](#)
- Questions
 - How do the system navigators through the Iowa Primary Care Association fit into the ADRCs?
 - System Navigators' job is to navigate and collaborate.
 - Goal of no wrong door is to make sure people are getting warm hand-off, not getting bounced around in the system.
 - More background information on the Behavioral Health Service System and Disability Service System: [HHS System Alignment | Health & Human Services](#).
 - What are the requirements for employment for people with disabilities? How do they access the Waiver?
 - One pager on the website: Work requirements: [IHAWP Community Engagement Requirements | Health & Human Services](#)

- ABA clinics are getting pushback MCO's requiring a diagnosis every 5 years, don't have access to diagnosticians, who do we talk to regarding this?
 - Email Larry Johnson and he will connect with appropriate department.
- Mentioned ADRC is for older individuals, where do children fit into the system?
 - Your Life Iowa can connect people to the DAPs.
 - ADRC network info: [Aging & Disability Resource Center \(ADRC\) Network | Health & Human Services](#)
- What is the progress in the Waiver redesign? When will it be implemented?
 - Currently looking at it to give a concrete timeline.
 - Updating online system.
 - Implementation changes this fall.
 - People should start seeing smaller Waivers change next spring.

Member Update (Erika Hertel, Allison Drew, Regional Autism Assistance Program)

- Wrapped up Spanish Autism Basics webinar series, 42 registered and 9 attendees, Jillian Reiher, PhD and Dayrin Lovan, LEND Outreach Coordinator were the presenters.
- Over the past year we have been rebranding RAP materials due to University of Iowa Health Care requirements.
 - Caregiver Guide has been updated and is being printed.
 - Process took longer than expected due to new requirements.
 - Required to go through Office of Patient Experience for input and review.
 - Reading level is considered for all materials, try to get it as low as possible, 6th grade level or below without compromising content or sounding condescending to the reader.
 - Wording may have changed to make sure it is accessible for all reading levels.
 - Link: [caregivers guide to autism spectrum disorder.pdf](#)
- RAP has taken over maintaining the Autism Diagnostic Provider list sASI maintained in the past.
 - How should we approach providers who are telehealth only? Should they be included in the list?
 - Panel members have had insurance providers reject some who are diagnosed via telehealth but have had many others who were accepted.
 - Find out what pieces are being done via telehealth? What assessment tools were used? Will their insurance company accept?
 - In the past RAP was recommended to not share them because some of the reports did not include some of this information or didn't mention what tool was used.
 - TELE-ASD-PEDS (TAP) measure
 - Todd Kopelman did a lot of work, out of Vanderbilt.
 - Kelly Pelzel, Todd Kopelman and Lea Boldt did some pilot work during the pandemic.
 - Vanderbilt was open about the fact that they had not finished their clinical trials yet. Results came out in December and have been very positive. TELE-ASD-PEDS performs as well as ADOS-2.
 - The person who trained Kelly Pelzel on the ADOS-2 was one of the authors and has done over 1,000 of them now with a lot of success.
 - Kelly will start piloting through ChildServe.
 - TELE-ASD-PEDS is for young children, not appropriate for older children.
 - https://journals.lww.com/jrnldb/fulldtext/2025/06000/in_home_tele_assessment_for_autism_in_toddlers.2.aspx
 - Should we add ABA providers who offer assessment to the list?
 - Panel agrees anyone offering assessments should be included due to limited access to providers in many areas.
 - Caveat to families about checking with insurance, what assessment is being used.
 - Make it clear there is Iowa code on who can diagnose, offer family education on what the Iowa law is.
 - Age cut-off for providers changes often, currently lists are divided into pediatrics and adults. Should we continue to divide it as children and adults? Or should the other list be older children (i.e. 12) through adult? What's the best way to divide that is family friendly?

- Age 12 is the age that the assessment tools often stop.
- Adolescence through adults suggested.
- ASI shares pediatric should be cut off at 12.

Member Update (Erin Enyart, Autism Society of Iowa)

- Started planning fall conference, Nov 6 at Sheraton in West Des Moines, theme is "More than Words" Communication in Action, launching resource fair and sponsorship information in July.
- Continue with support groups, please share with those who need them.
 - Will be starting a group for teachers/educators in the fall with Sue Askeland.
 - ASI Support Groups <https://autismia.com/support-groups/>.
- Continuing to plan Lunch and Learns.
- Exhausted water safety scholarships, applied for it again for next year.

Member Update (Megan Abramski, Division of Aging and Disability Services, Iowa Department of Health and Human Services)

- Autism Support Program will remain through next year and appropriation will stay the same.
- Actively working through the waiting list, 10 of them have either gotten on Medicaid or aged out, individuals have 30 days to get paperwork submitted.
- 3 were approved recently.
- Also have 3 other individuals who are pending approvals.
- With the current funding, ASP can remove 6 individuals from the waiting list and serve a total of 7 individuals.
- 11 others on the waiting list.
- Webpage was updated and houses the updated application, information: [Autism Support Program | Health & Human Services](#).

Member Update (Rose Cartee, Iowa Department of Education)

- Early stages of determining the best way to reach out to AEA's to find out what resources they have for individuals with autism and what they need.

Member Update (Autumn McKeel, Emergent Learning Clinic, Iowa ABA Legislative Committee)

- Iowa ABA Legislative Committee submitted letter to MCOs asking why the denials for ABA have increased, did not get a response, will email Larry Johnson.

Member Update (Samantha Cermak, Kelly Pelzel, ChildServe)

- Successfully got a specialty hospital accreditation.
- Opened Des Moines Location.
- Immediate openings for Autism Day Program in Cedar Rapids and Iowa City.
- Post Doc coming in August, expanding psychology/diagnostic services.
- Kelly is piloting telehealth, doing more therapy appointments.

Member Update (Brad Zelinger, Stride Autism Center)

- Opening a new center in West Des Moines later this month.

Member Update (Monica Kurtz, Grant Wood Area Education Agency)

- AEAs continue to face challenges.
- Caseloads continue to be very high.
- There will be changes to how autism consultants will serve kids in the fall, will update in the future.

Member Update (Josh Cobbs, Autism Speaks)

- Continuing to expand employment offerings.
- Course available to parents on different types of work and how it can lead to employment.
- Still onboarding different businesses, please reach out to Autism Speaks if you know of a business that needs help with training.

Member Update (Kristin Hanson, Axis Therapy Centers)

- Relocating Ankeny clinic to a bigger location in mid-August.
- Expanding Ames clinic next month.
- Hired 2 new Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) in Ames, 1 SLP in Ankeny, 1 Occupational Therapist (OT) in Ankeny, and will be onboarding first SLP in Fort Dodge.

Discussion

- Discussion regarding continued challenges with denials for ABA from MCO's.
 - Many are going through appealing processes and have had success with most.

Meeting adjourned at 10:15 AM.