

**Regional Autism Assistance Program  
Expert Panel Meeting  
September 10, 2025, 10 AM – 12 PM  
Via Zoom**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization/Role Representing</b>	<b>Attended</b>
Megan Abramski	Division of Aging and Disability Services, Iowa Department of Health and Human Services	
Alyson Beytien	Beyond Behavior, Family Member	X
Josh Cobbs	Autism Speaks, Family Member	X
Amy Chebuhar	Iowa Department of Health and Human Services	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
Kristin Hanson	Axis Therapy Centers	
Erika Hertel	Regional Autism Assistance Program, Family Member	X
Michelle Holst	Iowa Department of Human Services, 1st Five	
Andrea Keith	Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services	X
Vanessa Kimm	Center for Disabilities and Development, University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital, Family Member	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
Leslie Rogers	ChildServe	
Samantha Cermak	ChildServe	
Erin Enyart	Autism Society of Iowa, Family Member	X
Wendy Trotter	Iowa Department of Education	
Maria Valdovinos	Drake University	X
Brad Zelinger	Stride Autism Centers	X

**Welcome** (Facilitator: Erika Hertel)  
Introductions

**Member Update** (Kristin Hanson, Axis Therapy Centers), shared by Erika Hertel on Kristin's behalf

- Axis Therapy Centers' 5th clinic location will be opening in Urbandale mid-October
- Other clinics are located in Ames, Ankeny, Fort Dodge, and West Des Moines

**Member Update** (Leslie Rogers, ChildServe), shared by Erika Hertel on Leslie's behalf

- Expanding to Davenport later this winter
  - Autism services
  - Rehab services
- The Des Moines location (previous Woodland Center) is slated to be open late spring/early summer. This will house Medical Childcare as well as additional outpatient services

**Member Update** (Allison Drew, Regional Autism Assistance Program)

- Autism Basics webinar series offered in March
  - Averaged about 122 in attendance each week and had
  - 292 registered who received the recording links
  - Received positive feedback from family members who attended and several foster parents who were able to receive foster parent training credit
- We were excited to offer Autism Basics Webinar Series in Spanish again
  - Material was prepared by Jillian Reiher, along with Dayrin Lovan
  - Presented in Spanish by Dayrin, LEND Outreach Coordinator, who speaks Spanish and is the parent of a child with autism
  - Averaged about 7 attendees each week
  - 20 total registered that received recording links
- Will offer English version again this fall on September 17 and 24, and October 1 and 8

**Member Update** (Erika Hertel, Regional Autism Assistance Program)

- Amy Fitzgibbon, new advanced registered nurse practitioner (ARNP) in Bettendorf
  - Currently in training
  - Replacing Peg Macek, ARNP, who is retiring after many years at Child Health Specialty Clinics
- Currently rebranding all materials
  - Caregiver guide still a work in progress
  - Reviewing content and rebranding guidelines

**Member Update** (Brad Zelinger, Stride)

- Now fully accredited by the Autism Commission on Quality (ACQ)
- Opened Cedar Rapids location in May
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Des Moines location opening in 2 weeks
- Immediate availability in most centers, short waitlists in a couple of locations

**Member Update** (Alyson Beytien, Beyond Behavior)

- Opening a clinic in Waverly in November
- Current openings for ABA in several clinics
- Can start supporting older adults in January

**Member Update** (Vanessa Kimm, Center for Disabilities and Development)

- Waitlist for autism evaluation at CDD is down to 6 months from 18 months
- CDD relocating in 2026

**Member Update** (Andrea Keith, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services)

- Continued funding challenges, looking at how to better manage funds

**Member Update** (Erin Enyart, Autism Society of Iowa)

- Fall Conference coming up in October
  - Resource tables still available
  - Variety of sessions available
- Day on the Hill is scheduled for January
  - Reserved entire rotunda and will host resource fair
  - Invites agencies to set tables up at no cost

**Member Update** (Jillian Reiher, Center for Disabilities and Development)

- Has been working hard to cut waitlist down
- Post Doc recently started and should be able to see patients independently soon

**Member Update** (Maria Valdovinos, Drake University)

- Planning to conduct focus groups with care providers and family members of people with autism to discuss experience with emergency departments
  - Started recruiting one group of providers that work in Emergency Departments
  - Will also conduct a group with families/primary caregivers
  - Small grant; will start in Des Moines area, collecting pilot data. Hoping to later expand
  - Providing families with compensation of \$25 per hour with gift card
  - If anyone is interested Maria can forward the language of the study

**Member Update** (Kelly Pelzel, ChildServe)

- Services will be available in Quad Cities in January
  - Coralville location will act as a central hub for Quad cities
  - Initially there won't be a psychologist in Davenport, Coralville will support that area with diagnostic services
- ImPACT provider training in spring 2026

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

- Team of 3, previously 7
- Supporting 33 school districts
- Challenges providing training

**Member Update** (Josh Cobbs, Autism Speaks)

- Additional virtual trainings coming out in October for those with higher support needs, focused on employment skills
- Looking for more businesses to train with Autism Speaks to offer employment to adults with autism
- Autism Friendly designation available for business

**Member Update** (Amy Chebuhar, Iowa Department of Health and Human Services)

- Has a connection with Medicaid Program Policy Managers at Iowa HHS that she can share denial issues with

**Discussion**

- Discussion regarding Iowa Medicaid ABA authorization requests being denied more regularly or capped at fewer hours than recommended
  - One MCO following another state's guidelines instead of Iowa's
  - Iowa law requiring insurance coverage for ABA therapy- could remind insurance companies they are in violation of Iowa law
  - Vineland being required by company, stating they haven't provided enough diagnostic information
  - Could ask what their credentials are and pointing out they are likely practicing outside their scope
  - Statements that doctor referral or referral from provider accepting specific insurance make referral

- Some requiring reevaluations for children whose diagnosis is 5 years old
- Barrier is providers' waitlists are too long to re-evaluate children who already have a diagnosis
- Amy Chebuhar can share denial issues with Medicaid Program Policy Managers at Iowa HHS
- Autism Support Program (ASP) continues to have a waitlist.
  - Continue to encourage families to apply as it shows the need.
  - Most who apply for ASP have Hawki.
- Vanessa Kimm asks if any ABA providers are interested in opening clinics in Ottumwa.
  - Beyond Behavior has been interested for 2 years, finding a space has been a barrier.
- Vanessa Kimm shares about an article regarding Iowa City School district noticing an increase in aggression and Office Discipline Referrals (ODR's) by 82% over a two-year period of time. Big concern about kids with autism in the schools and teacher shortage due to increase in behaviors causing PTSD. Is there anything in the state of Iowa addressing these concerns?
  - <https://corridorbusiness.com/iowa-city-community-school-district-must-protect-our-teachers/>
  - Maria shares she is not aware of any official discussions, but she is giving a talk at Drake relating to this issue. One thing that would help is if kids could access services without the autism diagnosis, but with behavior concerns in general.
  - Monica shares Iowa City School district has a different referral system than other schools. One thing AEA's used to be able to provide is autism training in the school district, unfortunately because of the way the state has deemed services, it is now a cost to the school districts.
    - Trainings can only be provided if they have been vetted and approved through the state.
    - Challenging behavior team used to be a team of 4-5, now only 2, they only have 2 classes now that have been vetted through the state.
    - Used to provide a lot of training, now there are more barriers to be able to provide.
    - Schools are under a significant amount of stress.
  - Alyson Beytien shares there has been an increase in behaviors and now teachers have less energy to deal with disabilities.
    - Have struggled with getting schools to allow them to come in and support.
    - Has had a principal tell a BCBA they are not part of the team and cannot ask questions.
  - Members noted families are able to invite anyone they want to an IEP
  - Discussion about kids who are not ready to learn and put in an environment that causes an increase in behaviors.
  - Some schools cause more challenges/barrier to parents regarding dual enrollment for ABA to be provided.
  - Some barriers could be minimized if ABA agencies could collaborate and be integrated into the schools.
    - What is the barrier for schools?
    - Maria suggests talking with the Board of Education about credentialing courses regarding behavior.
- Josh shares MCO watchdog group has a post about daily rates vs. hourly rates for CCO. Has anyone else heard if this is a true change?
  - No one else has heard this change

## **Advocacy**

- Erin Enyart shared-
  - Reconciliation bill passed
    - \$1 Trillion cuts to Medicaid over the next 10 years
    - Midterm elections important
  - Governor Reynolds not running again
  - Joni Ernst not running again
  - ASI hosting a resource fair at the Day on the Hill so agencies can talk with legislators/families about how these cuts will affect their services
    - Hoping to have 10-12 tables
    - Will have entire rotunda
- Erika shared Iowa Autism Council was one of the Councils eliminated and ended in June.
  - Offered advice, consultation, and recommendations to the Governor and the Iowa legislature regarding matters concerning the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) population

- Recommendations included continued funding for RAP
- How can we better utilize the Autism Speaks Iowa Community Stakeholder Call for advocacy efforts- will send upcoming meeting link
- Provider advocacy group that had been discussed in past did not move forward

### **Iowa's Autism Strategic Plan Progress**

- Erika shared we will look at ways track our progress on the Strategic Plan more intentionally. Asks group to look at the different focus areas and provide feedback on what we have made progress with and what we have lost sight of.
  - A-Get a Good Start:
    - Some have worked hard on getting waitlists down
    - CHSC does screenings in all regional centers, some are doing diagnostic evaluations for children who fall into certain categories.
      - CDD has been able to get kids in faster due to CHSC's program and in-depth screenings.
    - LTSAE and 1<sup>st</sup> Five efforts continue
    - RAP makes a continued effort to share information with families
  - B-Have Access To and Obtain Needed Services
    - There have been new locations and increase in services across the state, some agencies have had to close centers
  - C-Have Well-Informed, Empowered and Supported Families and Caregivers
    - RAP continues to provide support and inform families.
      - One thing to keep in mind is RAP has been flat funded since established, we receive more referrals and higher need families than before. It gets harder to provide adequate support.
    - With sunseting of IHH that could impact some families
    - Study Maria is conducting for emergency rooms experiences is important work
  - D-Successfully Transition to Adult Life
    - IVRS work, Autism Speaks employment work, Balance Autism homes utilizing technology increase access
    - A work in progress area for the state
  - E-Be Assured of Ongoing Coordination of Systems of Care and Support
    - Work in progress area
- Let Erika know if you have additional comments/input

Meeting adjourned at 11:39 AM.