

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are used interchangeably to describe a group of complex disorders of brain development that impact how people communicate, interact, and behave.¹ **Behaviors associated with ASD can be evident in children prior to two years old, however most signs and symptoms begin to appear between 2-3 years old.**² Therefore, early intervention services are crucial, as they are more effective when they are provided early in life.³ Additionally, early diagnosis and intervention for autism have long-term positive effects on symptoms and skills.⁴ Unfortunately, accessing early intervention and autism services can be difficult, with barriers including the availability of qualified and adequately trained professionals, the lack of transportation, and gaps in healthcare coverage.

Diagnosing Autism Spectrum Disorder

The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) is the primary tool for diagnosis of ASD. In order for a child to be diagnosed with ASD, the DSM-5 requires that they demonstrate a combination of:⁵

Persistent deficits in social communications and interactions:

- Ability to engage in social interactions between two or more people
- Nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction
- Developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships

AND

Restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviors, interests, and activities:

- Repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech
- Insistence on sameness; inflexible adherence to routines
- Highly restricted, abnormally intense, and fixated interests

Autism Spectrum Disorder in Georgia



49,303

children in Georgia, ages 3-17, were diagnosed with autism in 2019-2020⁶

Factors related to apparent increase in prevalence:⁷

- Improved diagnosis criteria
- Environmental influences, such as parental age at conception, prematurity, and birth weight
- Increased awareness and earlier screenings

Behavioral Analysts in Georgia⁸

Applied Behavior Analysis is an evidence-based therapy used for people with autism and other developmental disorders that supports language and communication, attention and memory, and behavior concerns.⁹

CERTIFICATION	Doctoral (BCBA)	Master's/Graduate (BCBA)	Bachelor (BCaBA)	Total
STATEWIDE COUNT	79	1,178	60	1,317

BCBA: Board Certified Behavior Analyst

BCaBA: Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analyst

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase workforce capacity to serve, and availability crisis services and supports for, individuals with dual diagnoses (i.e., behavioral health disorder and intellectual/developmental disability).
- Require public and private insurers to allow ABA therapy upon autism diagnosis from primary care physician or child psychiatrist while waiting for a psychological evaluation.
- Develop a registered behavior technician (RBT) program within the Technical College System of Georgia to help meet the state's need for a larger autism and behavioral health workforce.
- Review, and if necessary, strengthen policies, procedures, state licensing provisions and quality monitoring of residential treatment and respite care for children and youth with behavioral health conditions, including serious emotional disturbance, substance use disorders, and autism.
- Assess gaps in coordination of services through Babies Can't Wait (Department of Public Health) and Preschool Special Education Program (Georgia Department of Education), then structure and fund programs adequately.
- Encourage schools to partner with community providers of autism services to increase availability of supports in academic settings.
- Promote early identification educational opportunities for new and existing child care workforce members to better serve infants and young children aged 0-4 and their caregivers.

Sources for Autism Spectrum Disorder

- 1 Marcus Autism Center. "What is Autism?". Retrieved November 8, 2022. <https://www.marcus.org/autism-resources/what-is-autism>.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Why Act Early if You're Concerned about Development? Accessed November 9, 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/whyActEarly.html>.
- 4 United States Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health. Early Intervention for Autism. Accessed November 9, 2022. <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/autism/conditioninfo/treatments/early-intervention#>.
- 5 American Psychiatric Association, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, (Arlington, VA, 2014), 50.
- 6 Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "Health Resources and Services Administration: 2019-2020. National Survey of Children's Health" Accessed November 8, 2022. <https://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=8549&r=1&r2=12>.
- 7 Autism Speaks. "100 Day Kit for Families of Newly Diagnosed Young Children." Accessed November 8, 2022. https://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/100_Day_Tool_Kit_Young_Children.pdf.
- 8 Behavior Analyst Certification Board. "BCBA/BCaBA Registry." Accessed November 8, 2022. <https://www.bacb.com/services/o.php?page-101135&s=1>.
- 9 Autism Speaks. Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). Accessed November 8, 2022. <https://www.autismspeaks.org/applied-behavior-analysis>.