



# Iowa Department of Human Services

Terry E. Branstad  
Governor

Kim Reynolds  
Lt. Governor

Charles M. Palmer  
Director

December 31, 2015

Michael Marshall  
Secretary of Senate  
State Capitol Building  
LOCAL

Carmine Boal  
Chief Clerk of the House  
State Capitol Building  
LOCAL

Dear Ms. Boal and Mr. Marshall:

Enclosed please find copies of reports to the General Assembly relative to the Autism Support Program.

This report was prepared pursuant to the directive contained in 2013 Iowa Acts, Chapter 138, Sections 82-85 (Iowa Code section 225D.2).

Please feel free to contact me if you need additional information.

Sincerely,

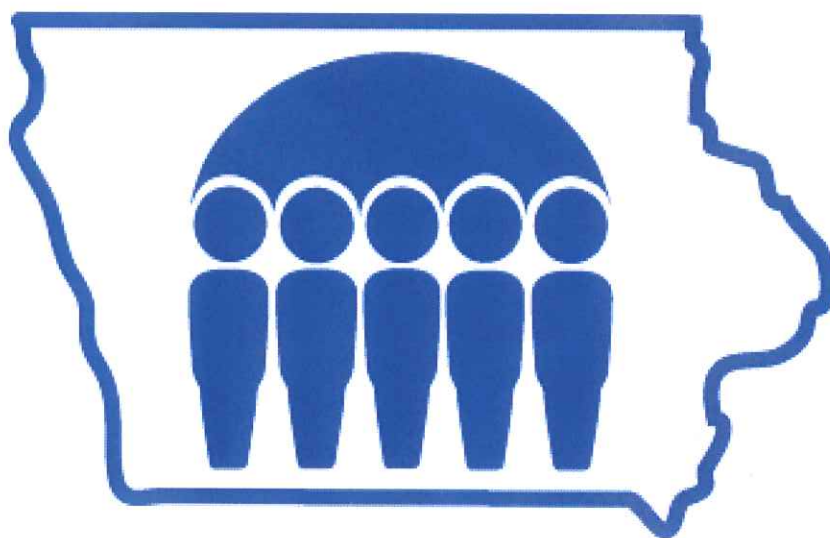
Paige M. Thorson  
Policy Advisor

PT/cf

Enclosure

cc: Terry E. Branstad, Governor

# Iowa Department of Human Services



## *Autism Support Program Annual Report*

**December 2015**

# Autism Support Program Annual Report

## Introduction:

The Autism Support Program (ASP) was created by the Iowa Legislature in 2013 to provide funding for applied behavioral analysis services for children under the age of nine who meet certain diagnostic and financial eligibility criteria. The Department of Human Services (Department) is required to submit an annual report no later than January 1 of every year regarding implementation of the Autism Support Program. Included in this report is a summary of the services provided in State Fiscal Year 2015 (SFY15) by the ASP and recommendations for continued operation of the program, as required by legislation.

## Program Overview:

Background: The Iowa Legislature created the Autism Support Program in 2013 Iowa Acts, Chapter 138, Sections 82-85, (Iowa Code section 225D.2).

The legislation directed the department to:

- implement an autism support program beginning January 1, 2014, to provide payment for the provision of applied behavioral analysis treatment for eligible individuals.
- adopt rules, including standards and guidelines pursuant to chapter 17A to implement and administer the program
- consult with and incorporate the recommendations of an expert panel convened by the regional autism assistance program to provide expert opinion on clinically relevant practices and guidance on program implementation and administration in adopting the rules, standards, and guidelines for the program
- implement and administer the program in a manner so that payment for services is available throughout the state, including in rural and under-resourced areas

Funding: The legislature appropriated two million dollars for SFY14 to fund the program beginning January 1, 2014. For SFY15, the legislature appropriated three million dollars and also allowed carryforward of the unspent SFY14 funds. During the 2015 the legislature appropriated an additional two million dollars to fund the program for SFY16.

Eligibility: The use of ASP funds is limited to individuals who meet a specific set of criteria. This criteria includes limitations based on diagnosis, source of diagnosis, age of applicant, financial status of the applicant's family, and services provided by an eligible Applied Behavior Analyst (ABA) provider.

Implementation: The Department issued a request for proposal (RFP) for administration of the ASP in November 2013. Magellan of Iowa (Magellan) was the sole bidder and was awarded the administrative contract in January 2014. The program began accepting applications April 1, 2014. As required by Iowa Code, the Department



promulgated rules for the ASP which took effect April 1, 2014 and are located in the Iowa Administrative Code at 441-22.

The contract with Magellan ends on December 31, 2015. The administration of the ASP was included in the RFP for the Iowa High Quality Healthcare Initiative and will be moved to the Managed Care Organizations who have been contracted with to administer the Medicaid program.

Workforce: The SFY16 legislation designated \$250,000 of the two million dollar appropriation to be used to fund a board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA) and board-certified assistant behavior analyst (BCaBA) grants program administered by the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH). This program is intended to help increase the availability of professionals to provide Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services in the state. The program is to provide grants to Iowa resident and nonresident applicants who have been accepted for admission or are attending a board of regents university, community college, or an accredited private institution, are enrolled in a program to be eligible for board certification as a behavior analyst or assistant behavior analyst, and demonstrate financial need, with priority in the awarding of grants given to applicants who are residents of Iowa. The Department and the Department of Education are working with IDPH as they develop administrative rules and a request for proposals to implement the grant program. There are currently about 52 BCBAs and 13 BCaBAs practicing in Iowa.

### **SFY15 Data:**

Iowa Code section 225D.2(5)(d) requires this annual report to address the following items for the preceding fiscal year:

1. The total number of applications received under the program for the immediately preceding fiscal year.
  - Magellan received 30 applications during SFY15.
2. The number of applications approved and the total amount of funding expended for reimbursements under the program in the immediately preceding fiscal year.
  - Magellan approved 16 of the applications received during SFY15. The remaining 14 applications were denied for the following reasons: 9 were Medicaid-eligible, 2 did not supply evidence of denial by third-party insurance, and 3 were over income guidelines.
  - A total of \$120,875.88 was expended during SFY15 for reimbursement to ABA service providers.
3. The cost of administering the program in the immediately preceding fiscal year.

- Magellan received a 10% administrative fee of \$12,087.59 for SFY15 administrative costs.
4. The number of eligible individuals on a waiting list, if any, and amount of funding necessary to reduce the existing waiting list.
- No individuals are currently on a waiting list due to funding. Within individual provider agencies, individuals may be on waiting lists due to lack of provider capacity, but funding is sufficient to serve all eligible individuals at this time.

### **Stakeholder Input:**

The Department and Magellan have regular meetings and contacts with the University of Iowa Regional Autism Program (RAP) Expert Stakeholder Panel to discuss the implementation of the ASP. The expert panel consists of families of individuals with autism; educational, medical, and human services specialists, professionals, and providers; and others with interest in or expertise related to autism. The Expert Stakeholder Panel has the following concerns:

Provider Network: The availability of providers in the ASP network is limited, as is the availability of ABA providers in Iowa. Magellan reports that they have reached out to the pool of board certified behavior analysts in Iowa to invite them to join the ASP network, but many are not available to provide ABA to children in community-based settings. Magellan has a network of nine ABA providers, with one provider having locations in four communities.

Statewide Access: The geographic distribution of ABA providers within the state is uneven. Services in certain parts of the state and have proposed increased access to telehealth services as one way to address geographic gaps. Magellan has communicated to providers and advocates that telehealth is an accepted form of service delivery. Providers will continue to be encouraged to use all resources available to them to serve children outside of their geographical areas.

Age Limitation: The requirement that the child be less than nine years of age at time of application excludes older children who could benefit from the program and have recommended that the maximum age for applicants be raised.

Definition of Autism Service Provider: The limited number of BCBAs in Iowa makes it difficult for families to access services. Expanding the definition of "Autism Service Provider" to include BCaBAs performing specific duties under the supervision of BCBAs. BCaBA credentialing requires a bachelor's degree including specific coursework related to ABA, one thousand hours of field work, one hundred hours of supervision by a BCBA, and successful completion of a comprehensive examination. This change would increase access to service providers and maintain quality standards.



Diagnostic Evaluations: The requirement that the diagnosis of autism required for ASP eligibility must be provided by a child psychiatrist, developmental pediatrician, or clinical psychologist can result in significant delays in scheduling diagnostic evaluations, leading to delays in the ability of a family to apply for ASP funds.

Income Guidelines: Some middle income families may struggle to pay for ABA services for a child with autism. Modifying the income guidelines to allow participation, on a sliding fee schedule, by families with incomes over the 400% federal poverty level would expand access to services.

Provider Rates: More ABA service providers are still needed in Iowa. Reviewing provider rates and ensuring that they are reasonable and competitive may incentivize more providers to come to, or stay in, Iowa.

The RAP program has care coordinators located at Child Health Specialty Clinics across the state to assist families with access to services and supports, and also works with health care professionals who see young children diagnosed with autism to encourage them to make referrals to the RAP program so that they can be connected with the ASP or other appropriate services.

## **Recommendations:**

The Department recommends that the Autism Support Program continue to operate under its current structure with consideration to the issues raised by the Expert Stakeholder Panel. The number of applications has increased significantly during the program's second year. Twenty-one children have received ABA services since the program began in January 2014. Work with stakeholders will continue to publicize the program to families of children with a diagnosis of autism and to professionals who work with children who have, or are at risk of, a diagnosis of autism.