

**Regional Autism Assistance Program**  
**Expert Panel Meeting**  
**January 28, 2025, 9 AM – 11 AM**  
**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	X
Alyson Beytien	Beyond Behavior, Family Member	X
Josh Cobbs	Autism Speaks, Family Member	
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 and Support Services	X
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	X
Monica Kurtz	Grant Wood Area Education Agency	X
Toni Fuller Merfeld - represented by Megan Christiansen	Metro West Learning Center	X
Caroline Moniza	Mercy Family Counseling	
Steve Muller – represented by Evelyn Horton	Balance Autism	X
Kelly Pelzel	ChildServe	X
Jillian Reiher	Center for Disabilities and Development, University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital	X
Leslie Rogers (represented by Samantha Cermak)	ChildServe	X
Kristine Steinmetz	Autism Society of Iowa, Family Member	X
Wendy Trotter	Iowa Department of Education	
Maria Valdovinos	Drake University	
Brad Zelinger	Stride Autism Centers	X

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

**Member Update** (Kris Steinmetz, Autism Society of Iowa)

- Autism Advocacy and Acceptance Day on the Hill
  - January 16, 2025
  - 94 in attendance
  - Rally included legislators, providers, and self-advocates
  - Governor Reynolds invited group for a proclamation signing
  - Next year Day on the Hill is scheduled for 1/27/2026—entire rotunda is reserved
- Legislative updates as of 1/2/25
  - Bills Introduced:
    - HF 5 – Autism Insurance Coverage Bill. Directs self-regulated insurance plans to expand coverage for ASD treatment by eliminating annual caps on coverage (currently \$36,000/year) and limits on the number of covered visits. It also eliminates the age cap (currently 18) so that coverage can be offered to adults.
      - The DD Council has calculated that over 53,000 adults in Iowa are living with ASD.
    - UPDATE: HF 5 passed out of sub-committee 1/28/2025.
    - HF 97 and SF 14 – Comprehensive Transition Program Bills. These bills make comprehensive transition and post-secondary programs more affordable like REACH and NEXT by offering a \$5000/year scholarship.
    - HSB 10 – This bill allows a school district to hire an athletic trainer instead of a school nurse. It proceeded out of subcommittee and moves to the full HHS Committee.
      - Some concerns legislators were discussing—athletic trainers don't have experience with elementary age children, no experience managing medication and no seizure experience. It would save schools money to hire an athletic trainer, some rural areas also have challenges hiring school nurses.
    - HF 102 and SF 111 – Seizure Safe Schools Bills. These bills require schools to develop seizure action, makes sure seizure training is offered in schools, and makes sure someone in the school is trained to administer seizure medication.
    - SF 80 – Disability and Athletic Team Participation. The lead special education teacher for a student's IEP would determine if the student with a disability is able to play a school sport.
      - This bill did not make it out of committee in 2024 but was reintroduced and has moved to the Senate Education Committee.
  - Information:
    - A bill is being proposed by Rep. Ann Meyer to add ABA Benefits to Hawki Insurance. This bill would allow families who are receiving ABA through the ASP Fund to continue but no new families would be accepted.
    - Rep. Josh Turek will reintroduce the Work without Worry Bill this week.
    - Sen. Sarah Trone Garriott is collecting letters about the school truancy bill that was enacted in July. Many parents are receiving truancy letters that have children with disabilities. Every school district is interpreting differently.
    - HHS Committee has co-chairs, and one is new to the committee, Rep. Carter Nordman. The Vice Chair, Rep. Brett Barker is also new, along with four members of the committee.
    - Nearly ½ of the Education Committee is new, including the Vice Chair, Rep. Samantha Fett.

- The HHS Budget Committee is chaired by Rep. Ann Meyer and a ranking member is Rep. Josh Turek. RAP is funded through HHS budget, important to let members know how important Family Navigators and RAP is to keep funding going.
- First Funnel Deadline is March 7, 2025. Bills must be voted out of committee by then.
- ASI invited to the Epilepsy Day on the Hill and will be attending.

#### **Member Update** (Megan Abramski, Iowa Department of Health and Human Services)

- Autism Support Program update-
  - Currently working with 7 providers and serving 13 individuals, majority are on Hawki. There are a few on private insurance that does not offer ABA coverage.
  - First time having a waitlist, about 10 individuals on the waitlist. Keeping a close eye on funding-monitoring monthly to make sure staying within funds allowed. Waitlist has not been done before. Hoping to move individuals off waitlist as soon as possible.
- Erika shared Maria Valdovinos, Drake University, RAP Expert Panel member, approached at the Day on the Hill and asked about the number of children who would be over income to qualify for Hawki if ASP goes away. Wondered if it's something we should consider as an advocacy point.
- Kristin asks if there is a cap for how much funding a family can receive? They can receive up to \$36,000 per year, they can receive services for up to 24 months. Kristin shares in her experience it only covers about 3-4 months of service—ASP is aware of this concern
- Funding has never changed since 2014

#### **Member Update** (Brad Zelinger, Stride Autism Center)

- 20<sup>th</sup> site under construction in Cedar Rapids, will be open in April.
- Two more Iowa locations opening this year.
- Last year delivered 300,000 direct care hours and added 200 to team.
- Just added a Chief Operating Officer- Emily Patrizi, BCBA, has 20 years of experience as an RBT, BCBA and operational roles at Trumpet Behavioral Health.
- Received Top Work Places awards in 2024 and 2025.
- Trying to create a provider advocacy work group-met at the end of last year.
  - Strong interest in lobbying for increased reimbursement to expand access to care. Representatives from 5 organizations.
  - Next steps-
    - Meet with Christa and Kate
    - Connect with Kelly on Scope and pricing for engagement
    - Loop in Mariel from CASP in future meetings
    - Consider a subcommittee of IACP
- IACP is the Iowa Association of Community Providers and has a lot of membership in the nursing field. They have had a lot of success in positive reimbursement rate changes in nursing.
  - currently no groups like this that are ABA focused

#### **Member Update** (Allison Drew, RAP)

- Autism Basics webinar series being offered by RAP this spring. This is a free webinar series for parents and caregivers of children newly diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, will begin in March. The dates set for the spring series are March 12, 19, 26 and April 2. We will also be hosting a Spanish series this spring and those dates will be set soon.

#### **Member Update** (Andrea Keith, IVRS)

- Going to be developing an employment first task force. Dr. James is a new administrator and is hoping to take action to improve employment services.
- No Waiting list-if anyone has not heard from IVRS, let Andrea know and she can get them connected.

#### **Member Update** (Kristin Hanson, Axis Therapy Centers)

- Received ACQ accreditation, Autism Commission on Quality, a subgroup founded by CASP—a certification that demonstrates an organizations commitment to providing high-quality, evidence-based services to individuals with autism. It involved a rigorous evaluation process, which took several months. It ensures an organization is in compliance with established standards, staff qualifications,

service delivery practices, ethical conduct and they are adhering to best practices. Axis is the first in Iowa to receive this accreditation. Kristin highly recommends and offers to talk with other organizations if they are looking to move forward to do this.

- Co-chair of Iowa special interest group through CASP. If anyone has things from Iowa email Kristin to bring to the meetings.
- Fort Dodge building will be moving to a bigger building in March. In process of expanding Ames, Ankeny and West Des Moines clinics.
- Current availability - Ames clinic has availability for half and full day ABA, Ankeny and West Des Moines has availability for OT, West Des Moines clinic has availability for feeding therapy.

#### **Member Update** (Samantha Cermak, ChildServe)

- Priorities for advocacy
  - Hawki
  - HF 5
  - Behavior Analysts to be included in loan repayment plans
- ChildServe—continue to be focused on comprehensive services through disciplinary team and approach, will be expanding Des Moines center.

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

- Second psychologist now available to do Autism evaluations
- Johnson will have a post-doctoral fellow that has interest in Autism and hopefully will be able to assist with evaluations

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

- One of their providers will begin offering services in Bettendorf.
- Will be adding another provider in the fall to help with autism evaluations as well.

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

- Opened a clinic in Carroll 2 weeks ago. Has availability, has worked with Rachel Charlot, family navigator with RAP, to help families get connected
- Planning to collaborate with Cultivating Hope farms to provide ABA at the farm while incorporating experiences with animals and being outside. Has worked with one client and it was successful. No certain target age, designed for children who aren't responding as well to the clinic setting. Age of referrals currently have been around 9-14.

#### **General Updates**

- Erika would like to update *Navigating Iowa's System of Care: A Caregiver's Guide to Autism Spectrum Disorder*. This booklet is given out to families by CDD, Blank, ChildServe, and Metro West following a new autism diagnosis, and provided by Family Navigators throughout the state to families who have not already received a copy. Designed after Autism Speaks 100 Day Kit, but this is shorter and more Iowa-specific.

Reviewed booklet page by page and members provided input on content.

- Discussion regarding insurance companies requiring the reassessment of autism if the original diagnosis was given a number of years ago before they will authorize coverage of ABA. It was asked if CDD or other diagnostic clinics could draft a letter stating they are not offering reassessments due to the long wait time for evaluations.

Meeting adjourned at 10:56 am