

Regional Autism Assistance Program
Expert Panel Meeting
April 22, 2025, 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	
Josh Cobbs	Autism Speaks, Family Member	
Amy Chebuhar	Iowa Department of Health and Human Services	
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	X
Erika Hertel	Regional Autism Assistance Program, Family Member	X
Michelle Holst	Iowa Department of Human Services, 1st Five	X
Andrea Keith	Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services	X
Vanessa Kimm	Center for Disabilities and Development, University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital	
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	ChildServe	X
Samantha Cermak	ChildServe	X
Kristine Steinmetz	Autism Society of Iowa, Family Member	X
Erin Enyart	Autism Society of Iowa	X
Wendy Trotter	Iowa Department of Education	
Maria Valdovinos	Drake University	
Brad Zelinger	Stride Autism Centers	X
Abbi Fletcher	Stride Autism Centers	X

Welcome (Facilitator: Erika Hertel)
Introductions

Member Update (Kris Steinmetz, Autism Society of Iowa)

- Legislative updates
 - HF 330 - Autism Bill to eliminate age caps and amounts by private insurance
 - Passed and on the Governors desk this morning to be signed
 - HF271- Comprehensive Transition Program which would provide scholarships for programs like REACH
 - Still alive
 - HF 835 and SF 368 – Seizure Safe Schools Bill
 - Still alive and now in the senate, it is likely this will pass
 - HF 509 – Adding Autism/ABA Treatment to Hawki and eliminating the ASP Fund – did not survive funnel but was added to the budget bill. The concern on this bill in the Senate was the amount of money required. The fiscal note says that \$753,000 would need to be added to FY 2026 and \$756,000 to FY 2027. 678 Children with an Autism Diagnosis are on Hawki. Everyone but one child on the ASP Fund qualifies for Hawki.
 - Important to talk to legislators about this
 - Iowa Health and Wellness Plan (Expanded Medicaid) work requirements is on the Governor's Desk
 - SF 2435 School Absentee Law Amendments:
 - Removal of requirements for schools to send certified mail notifications for families.
 - Provides schools flexibility is scheduling and conducting engagement meetings.
 - The Iowa Department of Education will develop a model policy for addressing chronic absenteeism, which districts can use as a resource.
 - Governor Reynolds is not running for reelection
- National updates
 - Executive Order to close the US Department of Education. Lack of oversight of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a concern. Also, Iowa's Vocational Rehabilitation Program receives most of its funding from the federal government through the Department of Education.
 - The lawsuit calling for Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act to be declared unconstitutional is still waiting for action from the Trump Administration. Iowa is one of the states that joined the lawsuit to challenge Section 504.
 - The proposed reorganization of the Department of Health and Human Services, including the Administration for Community Living (ACL), could eliminate or reduce funding for the Iowa DD Council, Disability Rights Iowa, and the University Center for Excellence in Development Disabilities.
 - Robert F. Kennedy pledges to find the cause of Autism by September.

Member Update (Allison Drew, RAP)

- Autism Basics webinar series offered by RAP in March. We averaged at about 122 in attendance each week and had 292 total registered that received the recording links. We received positive feedback from family members who attended and several foster parents who were able to receive foster parent training credit.
- We are excited to offer Autism Basics Webinar Series in Spanish again. The material has been prepared by Jillian Reiher along with Dayrin Lovan and will be presented in Spanish by Dayrin, LEND Outreach Coordinator who speaks Spanish and is the parent of a child with autism. We will be offering on Wednesdays from 12-1 PM for 4 weeks starting June 4. A flyer will be circulating soon

Member Update (Erika Hertel, RAP)

- Regional Autism Assistance Program updates
 - Attended the Profound Autism Summit, hosted by the Nashoba Learning group and the Profound Autism Alliance. This was a great opportunity to hear from family perspective, become

more aware of the language we use, learning more about the controversies and bringing the needs of those with profound autism to the table. Later in the registration they offered a virtual option.

- Continuing to work on the Caregiver Guide and making progress. Erika was contacted by Sydney Marshman, OTD, OTR/L, BCG, President of the Iowa Occupational Therapy Association. She came across the guide and wanted to offer some feedback and collaborate on the Occupational Therapy section. Dr. Marshman connected Erika with Jayna Niblock, PhD, OTD, OTR/L, BCP and they met yesterday to talk about occupational therapy, the guide, and how we could collaborate together. She sent some verbiage to be used/edited in the guide. There is still information to be added from the input given by the Expert Panel. References and website links have been updated.
- Child Health Specialty Clinic (CHSC) and RAP are going through rebranding to align University of Iowa Health Care. The logo is changing, but services will be the same. New signage has gone up at the regional centers. RAP is updating all of our materials. We will no longer be using the RAP map logo and colors. RAP has worked hard to get our name recognition out there and want to be sure people still know we are here and providing support to families. Updated RAP materials will be sent out when finalized and approved.

Member Update (Samantha Cermak, ChildServe)

- Continuing to work on Des Moines Center opening

Member Update (Erin Enyart, ASI)

- Finishing the April Lunch and Learn series
- Continuing to transition into Kris Steinmetz role

Member Update (Abbi Fletcher/Brad Zelinger, Stride Autism Center)

- Stride is opening up two new locations this spring.
 - 1st Cedar Rapids location in a week
 - Another Des Moines location in June
- Celebrating milestone of opening 10 Iowa locations!

Member Update (Andrea Keith, IVRS)

- IVRS director resigned
- Having issues with budget due to a policy that was created prior to the new administration. Required to pay more to those who are receiving social security, but there is not more funding for this requirement. Adult project search programs have ended due to funding.

Member Update (Kristin Hanson, Axis Therapy Centers)

- Officially moved into new Fort Dodge location, planning to expand services to offer speech and OT services. Currently looking for therapists.
- Kristin recently went to capitol hill and participated in advocacy work with CASP. Met with Senator Joni Ernst, Representative Zach Nun, and staffer for Chuck Grassley. They discussed the settings rule, department of labor classifications for behavior analysts, Tricare adding ABA as a benefit rather than a demonstration, and reimbursement rates. Would like to get SLPA's recognized in the state of Iowa to be able to provide more speech services to families on the waitlists. This was a positive experience.

Member Update (Leslie Rogers, ChildServe)

- Added psychiatry to list of services available for internal referrals only at this time. Will evaluate external referrals in the future

Member Update (Michelle Holst, Iowa Department of Human Services, 1st Five)

- Experiencing changes within the public health and early intervention systems.
- Staff changes within 1st Five program, implementation with LTSAE in the fall with the WIC program at first. Would like to have a state team to have a wider reach.

Member Update (Evelyn Horton, Balance Autism)

- With acquisition of Metro West Learning Center, will begin to accept Medicaid. Starting with those who have Medicaid as secondary. It will likely be 6 months before accepting.
- Opening Supported Employment services in the Quad Cities and Cedar Rapids location
- Waiting for approval to open RBSCL homes.

Member Update (Kelly Pelzel, ChildServe)

- Will be offering Project IMPACT training likely in spring 2026

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

- Autism Support Program update-
 - Currently serving 9 children, down from 12 children. One child now has insurance, the others have reached their limit. Watching waitlist closely, currently at 12 on the waitlist.
 - Streamlined process with claims and providers should receive payments sooner.

Member Update (Megan Christensen, Balance Autism)

- Excited for the transition/acquisition of Metro West Learning Center. Balance Autism is providing additional training to staff.

Member Update (Jillian Reiher, CDD)

- Changes at CDD
 - 2 ARNP's resigned and won't affect autism services, but could affect medication management services
 - Added 3 new providers which will hopefully help current providers focus on autism evaluations.
 - Working hard on waitlist on the 0-3 age group, waitlist is down to about 3-5 months for this age. The waitlist is longer for those over 3.

General Updates

- CDC updated the prevalence to 1:31
- Monica Kurtz offering PEERS for middle school and high school age students this summer.

Meeting adjourned at 9:39 AM.