

AUTISM = Success

 **AUTISM SOCIETY**
Improving the Lives of All Affected by Autism
Greater Akron



APRIL IS NATIONAL AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH

#StandUpForAutism



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AUTISM SOCIETY OF GREATER AKRON POSITION STATEMENT

The Autism Society of Greater Akron is an active advocate in the Autism Society of America's national efforts to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) from our service area of Summit, Stark, Medina, Portage and Wayne counties. ASGA's Board of Directors adopted the National Autism Society Policy Statement, including a nonpartisanship approach as we work across both ends of the political spectrum. We agree with focusing efforts on education, employment, family caregiving, Medicaid, social security and community living and for upholding fundamental human rights. In addition to our commitment to the national core advocacy principles (see national policy statement), we are focused on the following local and state issues:

ASGA Priorities on the State and Local Level

Education: ASGA recognizes progress made by school districts to include students with disabilities in the general school setting; we urge districts to continue to train educators in inclusive strategies, autism spectrum disorder, and relevant laws surrounding supporting students with an appropriate education. We urge districts to review all supports needed for teachers and students to be successful, including social and functional opportunities that are in addition to academic success, as outlined in the Individual with Disabilities Education Act. The quality of transition programs for youth who are aging out of school varies drastically within our service area from almost non-existent, to more robust programs that prepare students with the life skills needed for post-secondary education, employment or meaningful day activities. We urge a greater focus in the transition area for all, especially with life skills help that supports independent living to the extent possible for that individual.

Community Living and Housing: There are options for housing and community living in our area; there is room for improvement to ensure the safety, happiness and well being of individuals. Family caregivers report being fearful for the safety of their loved ones, including concerns about physical, sexual, and overall neglect. Ensuring thorough prosecution and full transparency of abuse is critical to the long-term health and safety of people living with a disability.

ASGA urges more leisure and recreational programs for people living with autism that support opportunities to develop friendships. This is especially urgent in the adult population, who often lose friendships once they graduate from a school to a community-based environment.

Employment: ASGA recognizes there is a lot of focus on increasing the employment rate for people with autism and other disabilities. ASGA urges improved training for job coaches who work with people with autism. Caregivers report a lack of understanding generally about how to support individuals within an employment environment, and also the length of time a person may need support. ASGA is committed to providing training in autism to the community to support opening more doors to employment.

Family Caregiving: ASGA's service territory is no different than national challenges where the family's role as caregivers places a strain on family resources and self-care. We urge the expansion of federal, state and local initiatives that provide a comprehensive family caregiving support system that includes funding for respite and other critical family support programs.

Caregivers continue to struggle with day care options, not only trained facilities for young children, but also support for after school care after children age out of day care. Caregiver ability to work and maintain employment is greatly challenged during this time. ASGA urges a better approach to after school care to allow for caregiver work and breaks to take care of their own health and well being.

Health Care: A recent study by Ohio State’s Wexner Medical Center highlighted healthcare challenges for people with autism and other disabilities finding it more difficult to find adequate and quality health care. The study showed health-care disparities between people with developmental disabilities, and those without, begin in childhood and continue throughout life — often worsening with age.

- Children with developmental disabilities are three times more likely than people without developmental disabilities to have issues such as unmet health-care needs.
- Among adults ages 31-64, people with developmental disabilities reported to have problems accessing needed health-care services at a rate almost five times higher than people without developmental disabilities.
- As for those 65 and older, people with developmental disabilities were more than seven times more likely to have trouble obtaining necessary care as others without developmental disabilities.

Developmental disabilities are chronic, lifelong conditions — like autism — that impair physical or cognitive functioning and require life-long appropriate care.

- ASGA applauds Ohio’s legislature for passing health insurance reform requiring insurers to cover the treatment of autism. We now urge the legislature to increase the age of support past 14, a critical time when individuals are transitioning out of the school and into the community environment. Study after study has proven that interventional therapies for people living with autism reduce the symptoms of autism and support greater independence, thus reducing the long-term costs to society.
- While there is progress in the area of healthcare support, there is still an urgent need in ASGA’s service area (and throughout Ohio) for trained physicians and other clinicians, including mental health providers, who know how to support and treat people with autism and other developmental disabilities.

Medicaid: ASGA urges the Ohio legislature to continue Medicaid Expansion. People with autism depend on Medicaid for a full range of health and other supports, including Waivers that pay for transportation, housing, respite, job coaches and medical expenses.

The BIG Idea

ASGA supports what may on its face seem like an impossible goal: creating a federal funding program that is appropriately structured for people with autism and other developmental disabilities. Medicaid, Medicare, and SSI/DI were not created with the unique needs of people with developmental disabilities in mind. We would argue that as a basic human right, a program should be created that meets those unique needs to better serve this vulnerable population.

The recommendations of this paper are solely those of the Autism Society of Greater Akron and incorporate information from its “Autism Wellness Survey” along with information from its ongoing “Help Line.”

