

DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES (DDS) AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDERS (ASD) INITIATIVE HIGHLIGHTS AND ACTIVITIES

The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) Autism Spectrum Disorders Initiative was created in 1997 in response to the increasing numbers of persons diagnosed with autism. The current caseload is over 38,000 persons. This number has increased from 4,911 persons served in August 1993.

There are four stated goals of the initiative:

- **POLICY:** to establish and carry out comprehensive public policy on the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of autism spectrum disorder.
- **PRACTICE:** to identify and promote best practices in assessment and diagnosis, treatment, education and training.
- **PARTNERS:** to promote partnerships, both public and private, for research and practice.
- **INFORMATION:** to provide current, updated information to families and practitioners.

Since 1997 the DDS Autism Initiative has produced the following results:

- In 1997, the Department co-published with the California Department of Education, *Best Practices for Designing and Delivering Effective Programs for Individuals with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD)*. This document outlines best practice procedures for designing intervention programs.
- In 1999, and at the request of the Legislature, the Department released its report on the growing population of persons with ASD in California. This report documented the rapid rise in the number of persons identified with ASD and established a legitimate need for research into the cause of the increase.
- Also in 1999, the Department established a contract with the U.C. Davis Medical Center to conduct an epidemiological study to determine the cause(s) of the rise in the number of persons with autism in California.
- In 2001, the Department awarded and then coordinated a Wellness grant to the Northern California Autism Collaborative to develop Best Practice Guidelines for evaluation and assessment of children birth to five years of age.
- Also in 2001, the Department established an expert advisory panel, known as the Director's Advisory Committee on Autistic Spectrum Disorders, to give the Department advice on developing best practice procedures for evaluation and assessment.
- In 2002, the Department, in collaboration with the Northern California Autism Collaborative, the Association of Regional Center Agencies and the Director's Advisory Committee on Autistic Spectrum Disorders, published a 180-page document entitled *Autistic Spectrum Disorders Best Practice Guidelines For Screening, Diagnosis And Assessment*. These guidelines, developed as part of the Initiative, have now garnered international recognition and acceptance as a standard of practice.
- Also in 2002, the Department initiated a statewide training, support and technical assistance program called the ASD Learning Collaborative for regional centers, special education, health providers and community-based professionals that serve the regional centers, on evaluation and assessment of persons with ASD.
- That same year, the Department also enhanced and expanded access to basic information about autism by publishing and posting on its website quarterly reports, the Fact Book (fifth edition) and other informative publications on ASD.

- Additionally in 2002, the Department began and has continued to offer data, ongoing technical consultation and support for several multimillion-dollar research efforts at California universities and government health agencies investigating the biological causes of ASD. Most notably, these include the Childhood Autism Risk from Genetics and the Environment (CHARGE) study, a study of the causes for autism and developmental delay; and, the Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities Research and Epidemiology (CADDRE) study to establish an epidemiologic surveillance system and conduct epidemiologic studies of autism.
- In 2003, the Department joined with the UC Davis M.I.N.D. Institute and the Center for Health & Technology to develop and implement best practice guidelines for a rural telehealth services for children with autism in remote communities.
- In 2004, the Department expanded its Learning Collaborative to include nine Northern California regional centers. The Learning collaborative supports the collaborative efforts of regional centers to join with other public agencies, service providers and advocates to implement best practice recommendations.
- In 2005, the Department published its eighth Fact Book containing descriptive statistics on the population of persons with ASD and the relative costs of programs appropriate to persons with ASD.
- The Governor's 2006/2007 Budget expanded the ASD Initiative. Funding allowed DDS to:
 - Provide training to clinicians and other professionals on the already published *ASD Best Practice Guidelines for Screening, Diagnosis, and Assessment*;
 - Develop *ASD Best Practice Guidelines for Effective Interventions*;
 - Establish the ASD Resource Project in coordination with the Family Resource Center Network of California; and,
 - Add one ASD Clinical Specialist and one ASD Program Coordinator at each of the 21 regional centers.
- In 2008, the Department updated its Autism Report to better inform families, regional centers, legislators, researchers and the public about the population of persons with ASD in California. *ASD Changes in the California Caseload June 1987-June 2007* is now available on the DDS website.
- Also in 2008, DDS published *ASD Best Practices in Inter-Organizational Collaboration: A How-To Manual for Organizations Working to Integrate Services for Persons with ASD and Their Families*, which is available on the DDS website.
- In 2009, DDS will publish the highly anticipated *ASD Best Practice Guidelines for Effective Interventions*. This document is a critical step toward addressing the need for increased understanding of evidence-based interventions and serves to inform clinical training, practice and research. It is intended to serve as a tool to assist families, children and adults with ASD, educators, medical and health practitioners, and other involved professionals make informed decisions in selecting and/or recommending intervention options for individuals with ASD, in an effort to enhance their lives and the lives around them.