

2016 State Autism Profiles

ALABAMA

DEMOGRAPHICS

In 2000, 849 or 0.85% of children ages 3-21 who received special education services in Alabama had autism. In 2014-2015, 6,333 or 7.69% of children with disabilities ages 3-21 who received special education services have autism.

Table 1-1: IDEA Part B - Children with Autism in Alabama for 2000-2001 and 2014-2015
(Child Count by Age Group)

	2000-2001	2014-2015
Age 3-5	84	493
Age 6-21	765	5,840
Age 3-21	849	6,333

Source: Reported by the State of Alabama in accordance with Section 618 of IDEA to U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs

Table 1-2: IDEA Part B - Children with Disabilities in Alabama for 2000-2001 and 2014-2015
(Child Count by Age Group)

	2000-2001	2014-2015
Age 3-5	7,554	7,150
Age 6-11	43,047	36,216
Age 12-17	44,068	34,388
Age 18-21	5,159	4,600
Age 6-21	92,274	75,204
Age 3-21	99,828	82,354

Source: Reported by the State of Alabama in accordance with Section 618 of IDEA to U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs

STATE TASK FORCE

Alabama Autism Task Force

In March 2007, Governor Bob R. Riley, Jr. signed H.J.R. 23 to create a statewide task force in autism. The Alabama Autism Task Force met for one year to examine the diagnosis and treatment of individuals with autism and to report to the legislature their findings and recommendations. The task force was composed of 25 members, including legislators and representatives from state agencies, healthcare providers, educators, and professionals with an interest in autism. H.J.R. 12 was signed by Gov. Riley on April 8, 2008, extending the reporting date for the task force to the third day of the 2009 Legislative Session. Rep. Cam Ward (R-Alabaster) served as the chair. The Task Force was dissolved after submitting its final report in January 2009.

http://www.autism.alabama.gov/Documents/Autism_Task_Force_Final_Report.pdf

Alabama Interagency Autism Coordinating Council (AIACC)

In 2009, Governor Bob R. Riley, Jr. signed H.B. 41, creating the Alabama Interagency Autism Coordinating Council to discuss policy questions pertaining to autism and to make recommendations. The council consists of one lead agency and representatives from other participating agencies in the fields of healthcare, research, education, and lawmaking. Each year the council develops a long-term plan for a comprehensive statewide system of care to individuals with autism spectrum disorders.

<http://www.autism.alabama.gov/>

In 2014, the Alabama Legislature passed Joint Resolution 117 directing the AIACC to include assistance to individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders, particularly Rett Syndrome, within the scope of its mission.

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STATE INSURANCE COVERAGE

In May 2012, S.B. 283, also known as the “Riley” Ward Act, became law. The law directs insurance providers to offer plans that include coverage for the treatment of autism through age 9 for individuals, and employers with at least 51 employees. Coverage for behavioral therapy is subject to a \$36,000 maximum benefit per year. Businesses can choose whether or not they want to provide coverage for employees, or parents could obtain the coverage as a rider. S.B. 283 is not an insurance mandate for autism services, but rather instructs insurance companies to offer coverage of screening, diagnosis, and evidence-based treatments (such as applied behavior analysis, or ABA) for people with autism. The policyholder would have to pay an extra or more expensive premium if he or she opted to accept the coverage. (*Ala. Code 1975, § 27-54A-2*)

In 2016, S.B. 224 was introduced which proposed requiring health benefit plans to cover the treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorder for a child age nine or under for certain insurance plans and contracts, instead of simply offering coverage. No further action on the bill was taken.

As noted above, Alabama currently does not mandate health insurance coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of individuals with autism. However, H.B. 677 was signed into law in 2000, providing equitable health insurance coverage for mental illnesses as defined by the International Classification of Diseases, including autism spectrum disorders. Under the law, group health benefits plans must provide coverage for the treatment and diagnosis of mental illnesses, as with medical illnesses. (*Ala. Code 1975, § 27-54-1*)

ESSENTIAL HEALTH BENEFITS

Alabama’s benchmark plan does not offer any autism services as part of the Essential Health Benefits package. However, plans for large employers outside of the federally-run exchange must still provide autism services including applied behavior analysis (ABA). (Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama; 320 Plan)

OTHER STATE ACTIVITY

Alabama Behavior Analyst Licensing Board

In 2014, the legislature passed and the Governor signed S.B. 13 establishing the Alabama Behavior Analyst Licensing Board within the Division of Developmental Disabilities of the Alabama Department of Mental Health. The new law authorizes the Board to regulate the practice of behavior analyst professionals in the state.

<http://www.mh.alabama.gov/ID/?sm=c>

<http://www.mh.alabama.gov/Downloads/ID/BehavioralAnalystLicensingBoardAppointedMembers.pdf>

In the 2016 legislative session, Senate Bill 379 was introduced to amend laws regarding the Alabama Behavior Analyst Licensing Board. The bill would provide that the board be established within the Department of Mental Health and that provide further for the qualifications for licensure. The bill was sent to the Governor on May 4, 2016. It was assigned Act No. 2016-400.

<https://legiscan.com/AL/text/SB379/2016>

Autism Spectrum Disorder Card

In 2014, the legislature passed Act 2014-344 authorizing the Department of Public Health to issue a card to Alabamians who have autism disorder spectrum to provide to law enforcement with their driver’s license as necessary. This is intended to assist in their interactions with first responders and law enforcement officers during potentially stressful situations. Wording on the card explains that the

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individual falls within the autism spectrum and may have difficulty communicating or understanding directions. The card further states that the person may become agitated if touched because of his or her medical condition. Before a card is issued, a health care provider must verify that the person is on the autism spectrum and contain contact information for someone who can confirm the cardholder's diagnosis.

<http://adph.org/disability/>

Guide Dogs

In 2011, the state legislature passed and the governor signed H.B. 502 to expand the use of a guide dog in places of public accommodation from individuals with visual impairments to people with a physical disability. Physical disability is defined as having a visual impairment, hearing impairment or autism spectrum disorder. (*Ala. Code 1975, § 21-7-4*)

Autism Centers

In 2009, the governor also signed H.B. 615, creating a system of non-residential autism centers that will provide resource and training services for persons of all ages with autism or not otherwise specified pervasive developmental disorders. Each center will work with a constituency board whose members will be chosen by the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives and will number no less than six. Each board member must either have a developmental disability or be a family member of someone who does. Each board will meet quarterly with the staff of its respective autism center to provide advice on policies, priorities, and activities. Each center will provide individual and direct family assistance, technical assistance and consultation services, professional training programs, and public education programs. (*Ala. Code 1975, § 22-57-20*)

EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

Alabama Autism Conference

The Alabama Autism Conference provides professionals with an interest in autism information on the latest in autism research. The conference is focused on professionals who provide services to individuals with autism and researchers. The annual Alabama Autism Conference is held at the University of Alabama – Tuscaloosa. The next Alabama Autism Conference is scheduled for February 24, 2017.

<http://training.ua.edu/autism/index.php>

STATE LEGISLATIVE CALENDAR

The Legislature convenes in regular annual sessions on the first Tuesday in February, except (1) in the first year of the four-year term, when the session will begin on the first Tuesday in March, and (2) in the last year of a four-year term, when the session will begin on the second Tuesday in January. The length of the regular session is limited to 30 meeting days within a period of 105 calendar days. The 2016 session convened on February 2, 2016 and adjourned on May 4, 2016. The 2017 session is expected to convene on February 7, 2017 and adjourn in May 2017.

<http://www.legislature.state.al.us/index.html>

Sponsors of Autism Legislation

Sen. Cam Ward (R-Bibb, Chilton, Jefferson, Shelby)
District 14
Sen. Quinton T. Ross, Jr. (D-Montgomery) District 26

Rep. Mac McCutcheon (R-Limestone, Madison) District 25
Rep. Randy Davis (R-Daphne) District 96