



The annual update of the **State Autism Profiles** continues to be the one of the top links when Google searching for state autism information. Begun in 2008 and updated every year since, it is the only consistent resource that presents comparable information across states.

The 2016 update is identifying some of the following trends in the field:

Almost all states began their autism work with a task force of the legislature or governor charged to develop a strategy to address the needs of individuals with autism in their state. Only a handful of those task forces still exist. Instead, states have set up standing committees, state offices or bureaus, or even some non-state agencies charged with implementing the strategies developed by those initial task forces. These new, more permanent entities often provide training, grants, outreach, assist in program development, advise the legislature on necessary changes, and share best practices. Easterseals affiliates are almost universally involved in and collaborating with these entities.

Almost all states have enacted autism insurance mandates of some sort by 2016. The vast majority were created legislatively, although a few were the result of lawsuits or other actions. Unfortunately, these mandates have very little consistency in what is covered – they differ by age of diagnosis, age receiving services, amount of coverage (hour or dollar limits), types of covered services, and types of insurance policies covered. This significantly limits the number of eligible individuals who can receive services and creates a catch 22 for families trying to navigate a complicated and limited system. The only state to add autism insurance legislation in 2016 was Oklahoma. Others attempted to expand their mandates, but most were unsuccessful. California succeeded in deleting its sunset provision so that its mandate will continue. Easterseals affiliates, along with the Office of Public Affairs, have been involved in these legislative issues from the beginning and are taking advantage of the opportunities this coverage provides.

Despite 2014 guidance from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) clarifying that Medicaid covers children with autism and that autism services must be provided under its Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit, only a few states are actually providing these services to Medicaid eligible children. Many states continue to either ignore or continue to “discuss” how they plan to serve these children. Parents in some states are resorting to lawsuits, and winning (Florida, Louisiana, and Washington state), to require coverage.

A relatively new trend in autism legislation is the creation of state licensure for behavior analysts, assistant behavior analysts and behavior analyst technicians either through independent licensing boards or under the authority of existing licensing boards (psychology for instance). Approximately half the states have adopted some form of licensure while a few states have adopted certification requirements in lieu of licensure. Very few states are looking to address the shortage of these professionals that they have now licensed. Affiliates who provide or are looking at providing autism services are closely watching these developments due to the already existing shortage of professionals to provide these services, particularly in rural or very urban areas.

Easterseals continues to be seen as an expert both in the state arena as well as federally. As the largest provider of autism services in the country, Easterseals was invited to a 2016 White House meeting looking at the interplay between autism services, mandates and coverage, and federal Mental Health Parity law. As the only provider in the room and as the creator of the State Autism Profiles, Easterseals was able to focus attention on the vast array of differences and limitations (*see above*) in state autism coverage across the country and the impact that has on providers. The Office of Public Affairs will continue to work to find ways of educating federal policymakers and urging stronger implementation of parity laws.

Easterseals Office of Public Affairs, November 2016