



MISSISSIPPI
AUTISM
ADVISORY
COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT 2022



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Annual report _____	4
Our Beginning _____	4
Our Mission _____	4
Committee Recommendations _____	4
What is Autism? _____	6
History of Legislative Actions _____	9
Mississippi Medicaid Report (Autism Therapy Code Related) - _____	12
Autism Related Insurance Report _____	12
Appendix A _____	15

Dear Legislators,

The Mississippi Autism Advisory Committee respectfully submits this annual report for your consideration and action. This year's report outlines a singular recommendation identified by our committee that requires immediate reform to alleviate the lack of autism therapy access for our Medicaid autistic population in Mississippi. We believe this recommendation will lay the foundation needed to address a multitude of issues facing our autism population.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) now constitutes a public health crisis in Mississippi and our nation as a whole. Data from the Centers for Disease Control shows a dramatic increase in the prevalence of ASD with 1 in 44 children being affected.^a Early intervention strategy such as Applied Behavior Analysis Therapy (ABA) for autism has shown a marked improvement in the quality of life.

Along with previous legislative action and grassroots efforts, autistic children in Mississippi have benefited with autism insurance coverage and several insurance companies lifting the age caps. However, autistic children with Medicaid coverage can't readily access autism behavioral therapies due to private providers not accepting Medicaid due to below market rates in our state. The lack of access is keeping these children from making emotional and developmental strides. It is truly a generational loss of intellectual and economic potential for so many of these children and families in our state.

On behalf of autistic people, their families, and the professionals who work with them, the Mississippi Autism Advisory Committee stands ready to assist in the implementation of this recommendation.

Sincerely,

Kristie Speights
Chairperson

Lynda Balfour
Co-Chair

Kristi Herrin
Co-Chair

^aCenters of Disease Control and Prevention. Prevalence and Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder Among Children Aged 8 Years - Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, 11 Sites, United States, 2016. Available online:

https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/ss6904a1.htm?s_cid=ss6904g1_w

ANNUAL REPORT

Our Beginning

The Mississippi Autism Advisory Committee (MAAC) was created by House Bill 1125¹ (2011 Regular Session) as the Legislature recognized an urgent need for strategies on how to best identify, treat, educate, accommodate and employ people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and assist their families.

Our Mission

The MAAC's mission is "to study, make recommendations and develop a strategic plan on how best to educate and train students with ASD to maximize their potential productivity within the workforce... and to develop an annual plan" outlining these strategies. The MAAC is tasked with writing a report to the legislature outlining any roadblocks to creating meaningful progress in the areas of mental health, education medical, and employment for people with ASD and their families.

The MAAC met six times this year. Based on these meetings and testimonies received within, the committee has chosen to focus this report on the included strategic recommendations as set forth below.

Committee Recommendations

The MAAC voted to recommend the Mississippi Legislature pass legislation to increase Medicaid Reimbursement Rates specific to the Autism CPT Codes (#97153, #97155, and #97156²) with competitive rates to incentivize more providers to offer services covered by Medicaid and for professional retention of the state's Board-Certified Behavioral Analysts (BCBA) and Registered Behavior Technicians (RBT). These specific codes are the most used codes in our state for autism therapy. The Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has clarified that treatment for ASD is a covered service under the Early Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit³. We believe that an increase in Medicaid reimbursement rates specific to ASD is beneficial for several reasons.

¹ <http://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2011/pdf/HB/1100-1199/HB1125SG.pdf>

² <https://medicaid.ms.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Autism-Spectrum-Disorder-ASD-FEE-SCHEDULE-Print-Date-10-05-2021.pdf>

³ <https://www.medicare.gov/federal-policy-guidance/downloads/cib-07-07-14.pdf>

1. *Approximately 53% of Mississippi Medicaid recipients are children, and 1 in 44 children are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder every year. This is a large population of citizens in need of accessible early intervention and therapy to become contributing members of society.*
2. *Left untreated, the cost of autism per capita = \$3.2 million ⁴*
3. *Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) therapy, considered the “Gold Standard” in Autism therapy as early intervention costs between \$60,000 - \$70,000 per child / per year, but the long-term savings have been estimated to be around \$1 million per child.*
4. *Due to low reimbursement rates, Mississippi is not providing adequate access to effective treatment by enrolling sufficient providers or enrolling new autism clients. Medicaid lags behind physician acceptance rates of new patients, particularly in states with lower Medicaid payment rates like Mississippi.⁵*
5. *Mississippi currently only has six Medicaid providers (Autism Center of North Mississippi, Golden Triangle Autism Center, MS Behavioral Services, Gulf Coast Education Solutions, MS Center for Autism and Related Disabilities {MCARD}, and Canopy) and three (Canopy, North MS Autism Center, and MCARD) of those are 501c3 non-profit organizations and are able to offset Medicaid clients with fundraisers and donations. The biggest limiting factor to more providers accepting Medicaid are the current rates.*
6. *Due to the low reimbursement rates, Mississippi is losing our locally trained ABA therapists and certified RBTs (Registered Behavior Technician) to neighboring states like Georgia that offer competitive rates as a profession.*

⁴ <https://www.flour.com/sitedocuments/incrementalsocietalcostsautism.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db195.pdf>

What is Autism?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability caused by differences in the brain. Some people on the autism spectrum have a known difference, such as a genetic condition. Other causes are not yet known. Scientists believe there are multiple causes of ASD that act together to change the most common ways people develop. We still have much to learn about these causes and how they impact people on the autism spectrum.⁶

Autism is a complex neurobehavioral disorder characterized by impairment in reciprocal social interaction, impairment in communication, and the presence of repetitive and stereotypic patterns of behaviors, interests, and activities. The onset of symptoms is typically before the age of 3 years. The severity of impairment in the given domains as well as the pattern of impairments varies from individual to individual; that is why diagnosticians refer to a “spectrum” of disability. Impairment in social interaction range from difficulty initiating and maintaining interaction, impaired ability to recognize and experience socially acceptable emotions, and difficulty processing and appreciating the thoughts and feelings of others. Communication deficits range from no useful form of communication to very advanced language abilities, but little ability to use language in a social manner. Repetitive and stereotypic behaviors include perseverative behaviors such as complex rituals, extreme difficulty adapting to change and transition, and unusual movements such as hand flapping, tapping, clapping or whirling (known as Stimming). Autism Spectrum Disorder is a single disorder described in the recently released fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). The diagnostic category no longer includes separate diagnoses for Asperger’s Syndrome and Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified. The DSM-5 also includes a related, but distinct, diagnostic category of Social Communication Disorder.⁷

People on the autism spectrum may behave, communicate, interact, and learn in ways that are different from most other people. There is often nothing about how they look that sets them apart from other people. The abilities of people on the autism spectrum can vary significantly. For example, some may have advanced conversation skills whereas others may be nonverbal. Some may need a lot of help in their daily lives; others can work and live with little to no support.

ASD begins before the age of 3 years and can last throughout a person's life, although symptoms may improve over time. Some children show ASD symptoms within the first 12 months of life. In others, symptoms may not show up until 24 months of age or later. Some gain new skills and meet developmental milestones until around 18 to 24 months of age, and then they stop gaining new skills or lose the skills they once had.

As children on the autism spectrum become adolescents and young adults, they may have difficulties developing and maintaining friendships, communicating with peers and adults, or understanding what behaviors are expected in school or on the job. They may come to the attention of healthcare providers and other professionals because they also have comorbidities such as anxiety, depression, or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, which occur more often in people with ASD than in people without ASD.

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/facts.html>

⁷ <https://www.asatonline.org/for-parents/what-is-autism>

Table 1 provides an overview of the increase in Autism Prevalence as identified by the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network.

**Table 1. Identified Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder ADDM Network 2014-2018
Combining Data from all Sites⁸**

Surveillance Year	Birth Year	# of ADDM sites reporting	Prevalence per 1,000 children (range)	This is 1 in X children diagnosed
2014	2006	11	16.8 (13.1 - 29.3)	1 in 59
2016	2008	11	18.5 (18.0 - 19.1)	1 in 54
2018	2010	11	23.0 (16.5 - 38.9)	1 in 44

Prevalence of Autism and Related Data:

- Based on the National Survey of Children’s Health (2019 - 2020), it is estimated that approximately 13,482 children (ages 3 -17) are currently diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), which makes up 2.3% of our childhood population.⁹
- ASD now affects 1 in 44 children.¹⁰
- ASD is the fourth most prevalent diagnosis in children age 3 - 17.¹¹
- 70% of children with ASD have at least one comorbid developmental or psychiatric condition.¹²

⁸ <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>

⁹ <https://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=5383&r=26>

¹⁰ <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>

¹¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/data.html>

¹² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24074734>

History of Mississippi Legislative Actions Related to Autism

The following section contains a non-exhaustive list of recent actions taken by the Mississippi Legislature concerning Autism Spectrum Disorder.

2007 – HB 1267 – Caring for Mississippi Individuals with Autism Task Force

During the 2007 session the Mississippi Legislature passed HB 1267¹³ establishing the Caring for Mississippi Individuals with Autism Task Force. This task force submitted their report in December 2007 containing recommendations related to workforce training, medical treatment, early intervention, educational practices, and infrastructure changes.

2011 – HB 1125 – Mississippi Autism Advisory Committee

Created in the 2011 Regular Session as the Legislature recognized an urgent need for strategies on how to best identify, treat, educate, accommodate and employ people with ASD and assist their families.¹⁴

2014 – HB 542 State and School Employees Health Insurance Management Board Task Force

HB 542¹⁵ requires the State and School Employees Health Insurance Management board to review and study “whether to expand coverage currently provided for the treatment of autism spectrum disorders under the State and School Employees Health Insurance Plan.

2015 – HB 885 – Autism Insurance Coverage Requirement

During the 2015 session of the Mississippi Legislature, House Bill 885¹⁶ was passed and signed into law by the Governor. This bill requires most health insurance policies to cover screening, diagnosis, and treatment of ASD up to age 8 and also provided the regulatory framework for the licensure and regulation of the practice of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), a profession providing empirically based treatment beneficial to people diagnosed with ASD.

2016 – 2020 – No Legislative Actions

¹³ <https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2007/pdf/HB/1200-1299/HB1267SG.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2011/pdf/HB/1100-1199/HB1125SG.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2014/pdf/HB/0500-0599/HB0542SG.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2015/pdf/HB/0800-0899/HB0885SG.pdf>

History of Mississippi Legislative Actions Related to Autism

2021 – SB 2799 – Medicaid Reimbursement Rates Freeze

In accordance with the Mississippi Code Section 43-13-117 (D), as amended by the Senate Bill 2799¹⁷ during the 2021 Legislative Session, the Mississippi Division of Medicaid (DOM) will freeze all Provider reimbursement rates at the levels in effect on July 1 of this year. The rate freeze will remain in effect until the Legislature authorizes rates adjustments.¹⁷

2022 – HB 656 – Delete Freeze on Medicaid Reimbursement Rates

To delete the provision that prohibits The Division of Medicaid's Rates of Reimbursement, Services, Charges and Fees from being increased, decreased or otherwise changed unless they are authorized by an amendment to this section by the legislature.¹⁸ House Bill 656 was signed by Governor Tate Reeves on April 18, 2022.

¹⁷ <https://Medicaid.ms.gov/Medicaid-reimbursement-rate-freeze-to-take-effect-July-1-2021>

¹⁸ <https://legiscan.com/MS/bill/HB657/2022>

Recent Autism Related Medicaid Reform Efforts:

2019 – Mississippi Division of Medicaid Amendment to State Plan Autism Spectrum Disorder

State Plan Amendment (SPA) 19-001¹⁹ Targeted Case Management (TCM) for Beneficiaries with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities (IDD) in Community-Based Settings, with a proposed effective date of January 1, 2019, has been approved by the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services. The SPA includes the following changes:

- Adding Autism Spectrum Disorder as a covered diagnosis
- Removing the needs-based criteria
- Revising the qualifications and training requirements for Targeted Care Managers

2018 – Mississippi Division of Medicaid Home and Community Based Services Waiver Renewal

In 2018 the Mississippi Division of Medicaid revised their home and community-based waiver program. This program furnishes an array of home and community-based services that assist Medicaid beneficiaries to live in the community including access to in-home supports,

community respite, job discovery, transition assistance day services, shared supported living supervised living, and supported living.

2018 – SB 2095 Authored by Tollison, Parks, Gollot, and Blackwell

In 2018, during regular session, SB 2095 was referred to Insurance; Appropriations on January 4, 2018 for review and vote. This Senate Bill 2095 was an act to amend section 83-9-26, Mississippi Code of 1972, to remove the age limitation on the requirement that health insurance policies provide coverage for Autism-Related treatment: and for related purposes. This SB 2095 Died in Committee on January 30, 2018.²⁰

**Through a Grass Roots Movement, “Lift the Cap” sponsored by parents and families of autistic individuals, and with the support of Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann and Insurance Commissioner Mike Chaney, three Mississippi insurance companies voluntarily agreed to lift the age limit cap on coverage of ABA therapy for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder. “Although the state’s 3 biggest insurers (MS Blue Cross Blue Shield, Magnolia Health, and UnitedHealth) have all agreed to lift the cap, the cap technically remains in place, as part of the state legislation code. Lifting it statewide, and requiring all insurers to comply will likely require legislation.”²¹*

¹⁹ <https://medicaid.ms.gov/spa-19-0001-targeted-case-management-tcm-for-beneficiaries-with-intellectual-and-or-developmental-disabilities-idd-in-community-based-settings/>

²⁰ <https://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/2018/pdf/history/SB/SB2095.xml>

²¹ <https://www.mississippitoday.org/2018/01/16/lives-changed-after-insurers-lift-cap-on-autism-services/>

Autism Related Insurance Report -

Table 2: Provides a comparison of the “Maximum Allowable Amounts” of reimbursement rates between BCBSMS reimbursement rates and Mississippi Medicaid reimbursement rates for ABA CPT Codes 97153, 97155, and 97156, as of May 2022.²²

May 2022	97153	97155	97156
Maximum Allowable Amounts	\$31.25 / 15 min.	\$31.25 / 15 min.	\$31.25 / 15 min.
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Mississippi	\$15.00 / 15 min.	\$25.00 / 15 min.	\$15.58 / 15 min.
Mississippi Medicaid	\$8.14 / 15 min.	\$19.92 / 15 min.	\$14.14 / 15 min.

²² <https://www.health.mil> (Search ABA Allowed Amounts 2022)

Mississippi Medicaid Report (Autism Therapy Code Related) –

- The MAAC sent an official Request of Information (ROI) to the Mississippi Medicaid office requesting the current amount of Mississippi Medicaid dollars being spent providing therapy to the state’s autistic population; specifically, CPT codes 97153, 97155, and 97156. The following is the information shared.

Table 3: Mississippi Medicaid Dollars allocated per specified codes for 2021 and 2022.

	97153	97155	97156	All Procedure Codes 97151-97158, 0362T, 373T
SFY 2022				
Total Unduplicated Beneficiary (person receiving coverage) for Procedure Code/s	142	124	63	193
Total \$ for Procedure Code/s	\$718,135.76 (\$8.41/unit-max 32 units/week)	\$195,245.52 (\$19.92/unit-max 24 units/week)	\$20,048.23 (\$14.14/unit-max 16 units/week)	\$1,035,597.28
SFY 2021				
Total Beneficiary (person receiving coverage) for Procedure Code/s	133 (\$8.41/unit-max 32 units/week)	100 (\$19.92/unit-max 24 units/week)	74 (\$14.14/unit-max 16 units/week)	174
Total \$ for Procedure Code/s	\$733,007.51	\$102,531.02	\$28,521.38	\$961,156.01

Table 4: provides a comparison of Medicaid Reimbursement Rates for Autism Therapy Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) between Mississippi and neighboring states as well as an illustration of the limitations and the lack of change in rates to accommodate the needs of the Autistic community.

CPT Code	CPT Description	MS Limitations	02/2021 MS Medicaid	07/2021 MS Medicaid	03/2022 MS Medicaid	2021 LA Medicaid	2021 N.C. Medicaid
97153	Adaptive behavior treatment by RBT^	Limited to 32 units/week Unit 15 = minutes	\$8.14 *Supposed to increase to \$11.35 in 2021	\$8.14	\$8.14	\$9.50 (RBT) \$11.50 (QHP*)	\$36.17
97155	Adaptive behavior treatment by physician, or QHP*	Only allows for 24 units/15 minutes per week (Max)	\$19.92	\$19.92	\$19.92	\$22.50	\$56.00
97156	Family adaptive behavior treatment by physician, or QHP*	16 units/week (15 min./week)	\$14.14	\$14.14	\$14.14	\$22.50	\$22.50

*QHP - Qualified Health Professional - Certified BCBA Therapist. ^RBT - Registered Behavior Technician

Major Issues with current Medicaid Reimbursement Rates

- Medicaid pays providers 72% of what Medicare pays for similar services. Autism **does not** have a Medicare equivalent. The disparity is even greater between Medicaid and private insurers.
- Mississippi Medicaid **does not** allow for billing of treatment planning, supervision, and other support services necessary to provide effective ABA therapy.
- Mississippi Medicaid **does not** delineate the rate based on who provides the therapy (RBT^ or QHP*).

Table 5: provides information of a sample of Mississippi Health Providers who offer ABA therapy and accept Medicaid coverage and private insurance coverage.

	Canopy Children's Solutions - Autism Services	MS Center for Autism Related Disabilities	Autism Center of North Mississippi
1. How many total clients diagnosed with ASD are you currently treating?	25	48	85
2. How many Medicaid ASD clients are you treating?	9 and 14 with Medicaid as secondary	20	42
3. How many Private insurance ASD clients are you treating?	16	28	41 (2 who are self-pay)
4. Do you categorize your ASD clients by levels of severity (1-3)?	NO	Yes	NO
5. How many Medicaid clients are currently on your waitlist?	84	344	97
6. How many Private Insurance clients are currently on your waitlist?	20 5 with secondary Medicaid and 5 unknown benefits	72	46 (17 unknown benefits)
7. What is your current waitlist time?	<i>"Hard number to quote... dependent on staffing clinic. Difficult to compete with the pay since we are the only location (Hinds) that accepts Medicaid. We've lost 4-5 staff, 3 RBTs. Wait time is around 1 - 2 years for our families in need, sometimes longer."</i>	<i>"Wait time is currently 2 - 3 years. Suffering being short staffed. Since Medicaid rates are significantly lower than private, we have to offset the balance to ensure we can continue to provide services. An increase in rates would help with staffing issues."</i>	<i>"Difficult to answer; many factors influence such as age, severity level verses opening with a therapist. We rarely have openings. June 30th, we will be dismissing 26 clients and discontinuing services to clients 10 years and older because we are losing BCBA's (therapists)."</i>

Appendix A

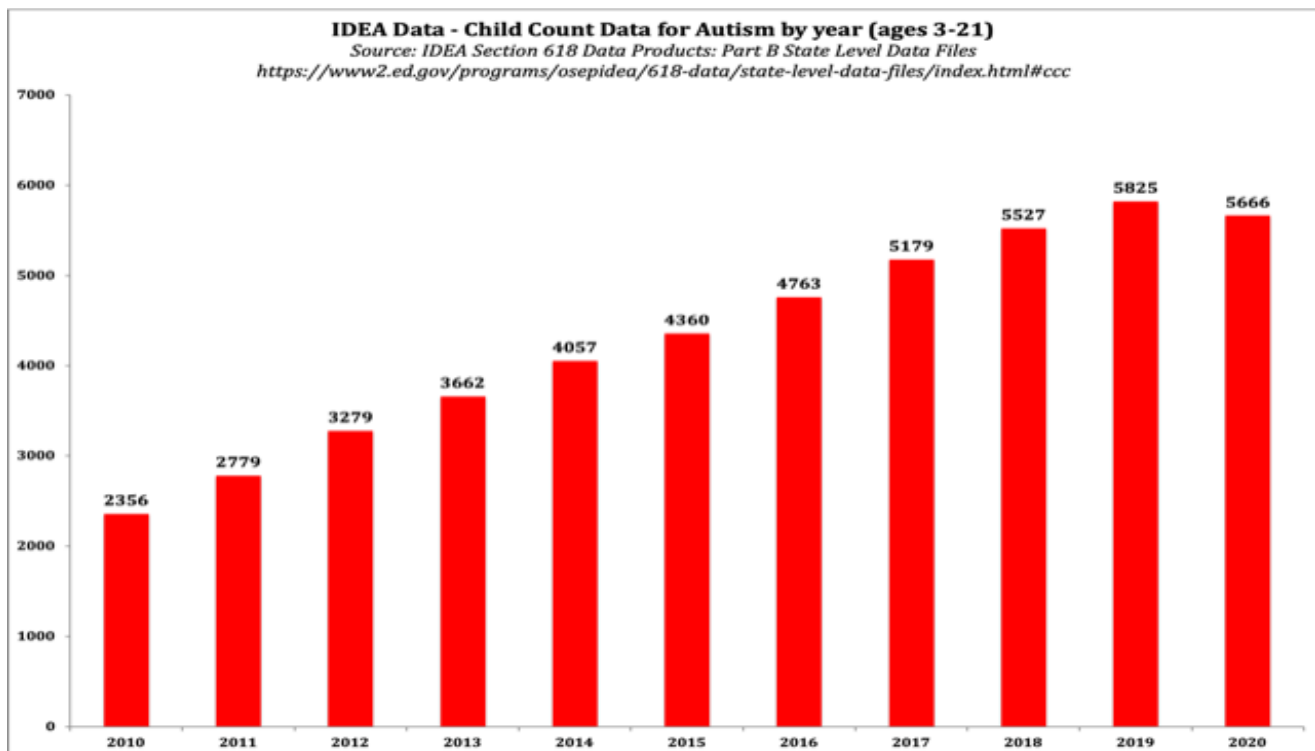
Key Findings on ASD Services Provided by Mississippi State Agencies

The following section provides key findings on the services provided by major state agencies in Mississippi that work with and provide services to our increasing population of people with ASD and their families.

Mississippi Department of Education Report

- The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) identified 5,666 children, ages 3 - 21, with the educational disability ruling of Autism (AU) as of November 1, 2020.

Table 6: Mississippi Department of Education Autism Child Count Data, 2010 - 2020



Mississippi Department of Mental Health Report

- The true number of people with ASD in Mississippi being served remains unclear as only one state agency - the Mississippi Department of Education tracks this population and only for children ages three (3) to twenty-one (21), who have the primary educational disability ruling of Autism (AU).
- In FY 2020, the Department of Mental Health reports the total number of children and youth served with Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED) under age 18 is 37,912. The total number served age 18-21 with SED is 5,450. The numbers of children and youth with SED and ASD diagnosis is unknown.
- The Autism Training Initiative began in 2012 and is designed to build capacity in Mississippi to provide evidence-based, lifespan services and supports based on the premise that people with autism are included in all settings. Since February 2014, sixty-five (65) Autism Foundations trainings have been offered throughout the entire state with over 2,750 attendees through June 2021. In 2021, the two trainings were conducted virtually: the Clarksdale School District with 32 participants; parents and professional staff, and MEMA and Red Cross with 20 participants. Plans are to continue to offer this training approximately four times per year, with each training being offered in a different region of the state.
- The Department of Mental Health sponsors and partners with the Mississippi Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities and with the Mississippi Statewide Autism Training Initiative to hold the: *Annual Autism Conference: Creating Your Own Path: Successful Transitions for Persons with Autism*.
 - **August 29, 2019:** The Conference featured Dr. Temple Grandin as the keynote speaker with over 400 participants. Ninety (90) parents were awarded stipends to attend this conference. The 2019 conference also included a half day pre-conference. The CE's were provided for teachers, social workers, nursing home administrators, SEMI and DMH credentials.
 - **September 10, 2020:** Held as a free virtual conference due to Covid-19 precautions. A total of 242 participants enrolled. CE's were provided for teachers, social workers, nursing home administrators and DMH credentials.
 - **September 9, 2021:** The Conference featured Dr. Carol Schall, Associate Professor of Virginia Commonwealth University as the keynote speaker.
 - **September 8, 2022:** The Conference will feature Raun Kaufman, former CEO of the Autism Treatment Center of America, as the keynote speaker. The conference was

held at the Courtyard by Marriott Gulfport Beachfront Hotel. A total of 117 participants attended. CE's were provided for teachers, nursing home administrators, and DMH credentials.

Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services – Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Report

State vocational rehabilitation agencies are one of the most important sources of employment services for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other disabilities. The following Table identifies the number of individuals with ASD that the office of Vocational Rehabilitation served from FY 2015 until May 2020:

Table 7: Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Served FY 2015 – May 2020

Fiscal Year	Number Served	Funds Spent
2015	249	\$481,040
2016	240	\$525,843
2017	253	\$526,779
2018	254	\$517,675
2019	400 (as of 4/30/19)	\$1,000,317
2020	604 (as of 6/29/20)	\$1,634,156
2021	628 (as of 6/2/21)	\$2,304,569
2022	635 (as of 5/23/22)	\$3,193,415

Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS), Office of Vocational Rehabilitation has a program specialist assigned to Autism whose duties include:

- Providing field staff updated information regarding ASD.
- Coordinating training for field staff on matters related to ASD.
- Coordinating services provided for individuals with ASD through private organizations.
- Working with Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors who are requesting other services for clients with ASD.

- Working closely with the Supported Employment Program Specialist regarding individuals with ASD by participating in Personal Care Planning meetings along with VR Counselor, client and family.
- Collaborating with VR Counselors and assisting in identifying services needed for individuals with ASD to assist with obtaining and maintaining competitive integrated employment.

Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation recognizes the importance of emphasizing the strengths and contributions that many of the clients with ASD can offer businesses. Individual characteristics such as punctuality, attention to details, consistency, reliability, or good visual-spatial or mechanical skills can make these individuals more attractive to employers. Vocational Rehabilitation counselors utilize different tools in seeking employment options for clients with ASD; they include but are not limited to:

- Person-Centered Planning: where an action plan is developed to provide directions in employment by identifying client desires, dreams, and employment goals.
- Customized Employment: includes discovery, profile portfolio, resume, and negotiation with employers and job placement.
- Project SEARCH Program: The Project SEARCH program is a unique, business led, one-year employment preparation program that prepares young people with developmental disabilities for competitive, integrated employment through total workplace immersion. The program provides real-life work experience combined with training in employability and independent-living skills to assist young people with developmental disabilities make a successful transition into adult life. MDRS partners with a school district and a host business to facilitate this program. There are currently thirteen (13) Project SEARCH sites across the state with five (5) more sites to begin in August 2022.

Through the Transition and Youth Career Services program, the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services assists qualified individuals with disabilities including those diagnosed with ASD from 14 - 24 years of age make the transition to a successful future. When an individual is in school, the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor works cooperatively with the Mississippi Department of Education and local school districts to help plan and implement pre-employment transition services. Vocational Rehabilitation Transition and Youth Counselors can begin providing Pre-ETS services to student as early as age fourteen (14).

Pre-employment Transition Services may include:

- Job Exploration Counseling
- Workplace Readiness Training
- Work-Based Learning Experiences
- Counseling on Post-Secondary Education and Training Opportunities
- Instruction in Self-Advocacy

Institutions of Higher Learning Report

Mississippi State University:

- Mississippi State University's Applied Behavior Analysis program is a Verified Course Sequence that covers all the required course work that meets the Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) requirements for credentialing as a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA). Mississippi State University just had its first graduating class in May 2022 of eleven (11) students receiving a Master's Degree in Applied Behavior Analysis. Ten (10) of the eleven (11) graduates plan to stay in Mississippi to practice but not all have secured job contracts to date. Mississippi State University offers a Verified Course Sequence that covers all the required course work for certification of Rehabilitative Behavioral Technicians (RBT).
- Mississippi State University is offering opportunities for graduate assistantships (100% waived tuition and monthly stipend), as well as scholarships, along with covering the cost of examination preparation to assist students studying for their BCBA test and pay for students to attend the state's ABA BAAMS (Behavior Analysis Association of Mississippi) Conference.

University of Mississippi:

- University of Mississippi's Applied Behavior Analysis program is a Verified Course Sequence that covers all the required course work that meets the Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) requirements for credentialing as a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA).

The University of Southern Mississippi:

- The University of Southern Mississippi's Applied Behavior Analysis program is a Verified Course Sequence that covers all the required course work that meets the Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) requirements for credentialing as a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA).

Holmes Community College, Goodman, MS:

- Holmes Community College is the first community college in the nation to establish coursework (Applied Behavior Analysis) for Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) Certification.

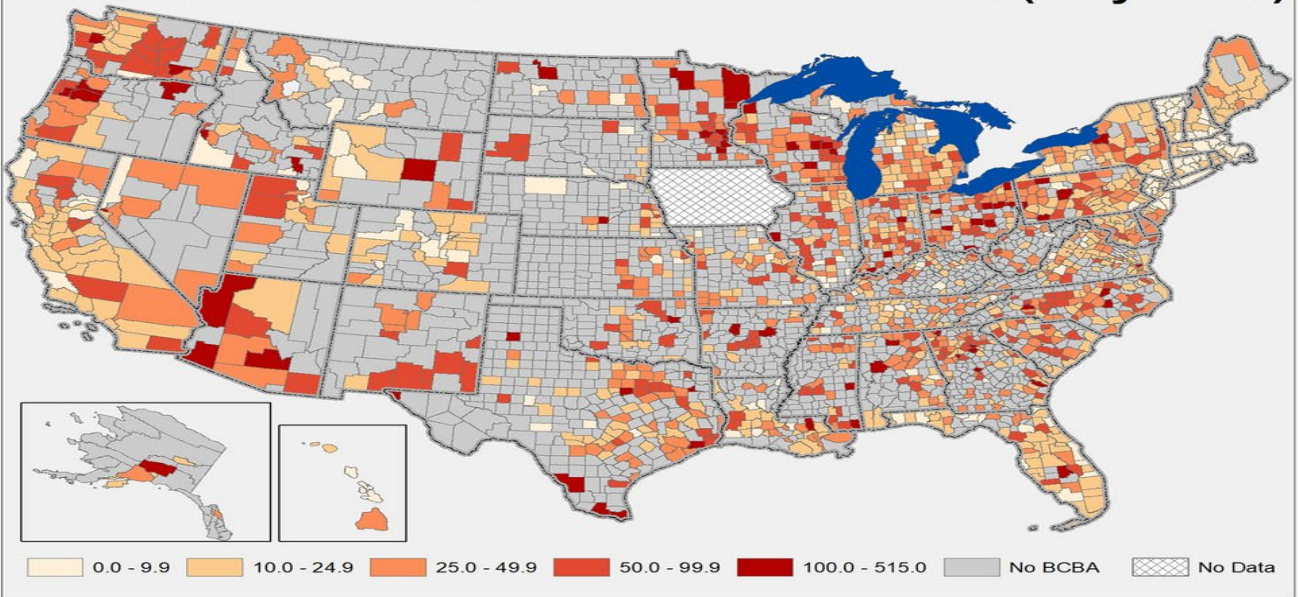
Pearl River Community College, Hattiesburg, MS:

- In March 2022, Pearl River Community College, Hattiesburg campus became the state's second community college to offer course work for Registered Behavioral Technician (RBT) Certification. Educators located in PRCC's six county districts are offered the

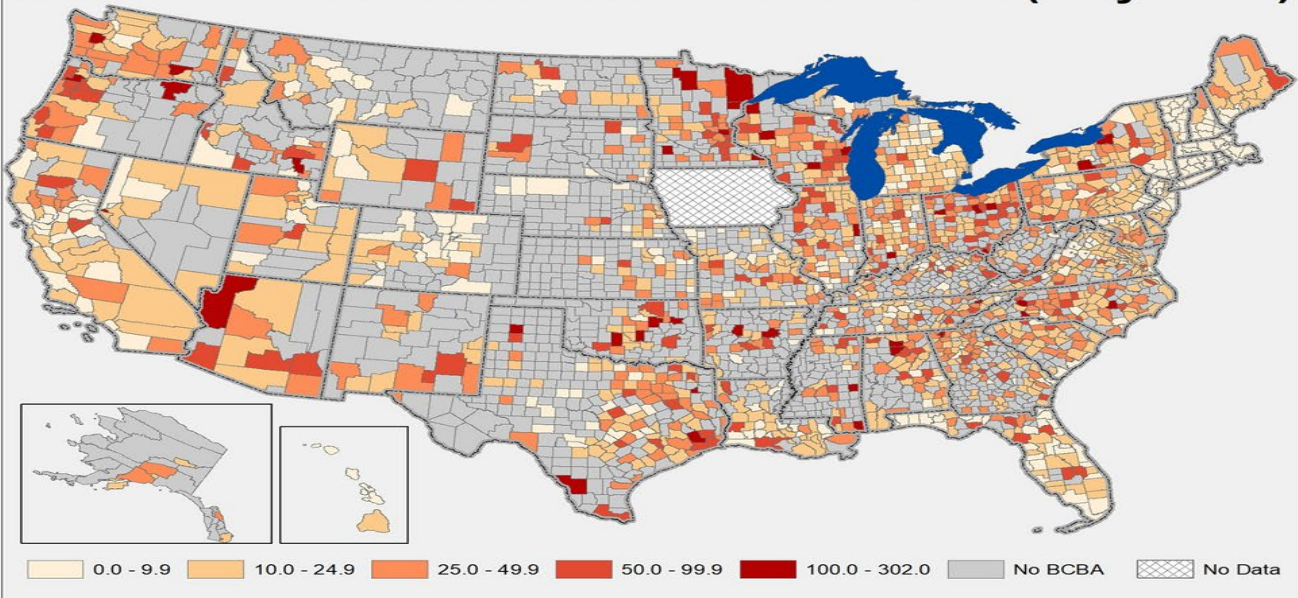
course for free. The first class enrolled consisted of twenty-six (26) educators within the PRCC area.

Table 8: Prevalence of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) per BCBA by U.S. County Natural breaks categorization of ASD per 1000 children enrolled.^b

Number of Children with ASD Per BCBA (July 2018)



Number of Children with ASD Per BCBA (July 2021)



^b <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10803-021-05402-0#Fig3>

- The Mississippi Autism Board (MAB) provided the current 2022 numbers of certified/registered therapists in Mississippi as:
 - 148 Board Certified Behavior Analyst
 - 10 Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analyst
 - 275 - 300 Registered Behavior Technician

* This clearly shows a huge discrepancy in number of ASD children who need therapy and available therapists in our state.

Committee Membership by Appointment

We would like to thank the following Mississippi Autism Advisory Committee Members (2021 - 2023) for their time and commitment to creating this Annual Report to present to our Legislators:

Member - Representing:	Appointed By:
Melody Madaris - Parent of Autistic Child	Governor
Kristie Speights - Employer of Autistic Individuals and Parent of Autistic Child	Governor
Kristin Lape - Employer of Autistic Individuals and Parent of Special Needs Child	Governor
Lynda Balfour - Parent of Autistic Child	Lieutenant Governor
Kristi Herrin - Parent of Autistic Child	Lieutenant Governor
Gentry Collier - Parent of Autistic Child	Speaker of the House
Dr. Margaret Ellmer - State Superintendent of Education	Superintendent of Department of Education
Ms. Brooke Shoup - Transition Coordinator	Superintendent of State Department of Education
Shelia Brown - MS Special Education Advisory Committee	Superintendent of State Department of Education
Dr. Gwendolyn Williams - The Special Education Advisory Committee	Superintendent of State Department of Education
Ms. Debra Sturgis-Stamps - Member of a Governing Body in a School District	Superintendent of State Department of Education
April Rice - Director of Special Education in School District	Superintendent of State Department of Education
Crysta Harris - Educator Working Directly with ASD Students	Superintendent of State Department of Education
Ms. Jordan Parker - Behavior Specialist Working Directly with ASD Students	Superintendent of State Department of Education
Dr. Kasee Stratton-Gadke - T.K. Martin Center for Technology and Disability	Director of the T.K. Martin Center

Member - Representing:	Appointed By:
Dr. Carlen Henington - MS Licensed School Psychologist Providing Evaluation	Mississippi Association of Psychologists in the Schools (MAPS)
Antario S. Knight - MS Licensed School Psychologist Providing Evaluation	President of the Mississippi Association of Psychologists in the Schools (MAPS)
Jennifer Jackson - Representative of MS Department of Rehabilitation Services	Executive Director of the Department of Rehabilitation Services
Craig Kittrell -Mississippi Department of Mental Health	Executive Director of the Department of Mental Health
Charles Hughes - Autism Advocacy Group/Professional	Executive Director of the Department of Mental Health
Dr. Kristin Merritte - Autism Advocacy Group/Professional	Executive Director of the Department of Mental Health
Dr. Christopher Furlow - Private Mental Health Providing ASD Services	Executive Director of the Department of Mental Health
Emily Warner - Licensed Speech Therapist	President of MS Speech Language Hearing Association (MSHA)
Gina Keene - Licensed Speech Therapist	President of MS Speech Language Heraring Association (MSHA)
Phillips Strickland - Representative of the MS Department of Insurance	Commissioner of Insurance
Pam Dollar - Project Director	Mississippi Parent Training and Information Center
Dr. Courtney Walker - UMMC Dept of Pediatrics ASD Provider	Vice Chancellor of the University of MS Medical Center
Gail Smith - Department of Human Services	Executive Director of the Department of Human Services