

Minutes for the Healthcare Subcommittee of the Alabama Autism Task Force

Meeting August 25, 2008

In attendance

Bama Hager  
Cam Ward  
Dennis Griffith  
Becca Wood  
Ryan Donaldson  
Steve Lafreniere  
Eddie Finn  
Spencer Lee  
Kathryn DeCola  
Libby Williams  
Tim Ferguson

At the conclusion of the meeting, the committee agreed upon the following initial goals for the 2008-2009 subcommittee.

1. Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are often excluded from private and public healthcare policy coverage. The subcommittee is interested in the specific inclusion of services for the diagnoses of Autism Spectrum Disorders in both private and public insurance coverage.
2. The subcommittee is interested in encouraging private insurance providers to increase the number of Occupational and Speech Therapy Sessions allowed by a policy in a given year. Specifically, the subcommittee discussed encouraging private coverage of 30 Occupational Therapy and 30 Speech Therapy sessions each year.
3. The subcommittee is interested in the coverage of payments to providers for the execution of screening instruments to identify ASD's.
4. The subcommittee is interested in the removal of age cut offs at adulthood for ASD related services.
5. The subcommittee is interested in pursuing a comprehensive Autism/Asperger's Syndrome awareness campaign. It is hoped that the implementation of such a campaign would assist with future public policy change in the treatment and diagnosis of ASD's.
6. The committee discussed its general approach to committee work for the year. It is the subcommittee's goal to first recommend what is helpful for ASD affected families without immediate regard for financial feasibility. In other words, the committee is working to state ideal or best practice healthcare coverage and availability of services for the state of Alabama. The subcommittee members agreed to first state what would be ideal in regards to healthcare for ASD in Alabama and focus on feasibility or funding issues after needs have been assessed and addressed.

Bama Hager opened the meeting. Cam Ward gave a review of the current legislative atmosphere including the financial constraints of funding new projects and new legislation in the state of Alabama.

Representative Ward has a meeting with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama this Thursday and the committee asked that he again introduce the idea of increased numbers of OT and SLP sessions covered by private insurance. Occupational Therapist, Becca Wood, led much of this discussion. In addition, the committee asked that Representative Ward discuss the removal of ASD as an exclusionary diagnosis for coverage of services. Representative Ward stated that he will discuss these topics at the meeting.

There was a discussion by the committee regarding the introduction of legislation to mandate ASD coverage by private insurers. Tim Ferguson discussed the pros of introducing legislation and the importance of stating the needs of ASD Alabama families without regard to funding constraints. Kathryn DeCola added that the inclusion for coverage extending into adulthood is an important addition to any proposed recommendations of the committee.

There was a discussion by Dennis Griffith, Cam Ward and Eddie Finn regarding medicaid and other public insurance coverage. Cam Ward stated that some states have instituted a limited service medicaid waiver for ASD.

A discussion introduced by Steve Lafreniere of healthcare coverage parity between physical illness and mental illness coverage by insurers, both public and private. Dennis Griffith said that he would be happy to present a short summary of these current national issues during the next committee meeting.

All committee members participated in a discussion of the need for a comprehensive awareness campaign to educate the public on how services for ASD benefit society as a whole.

Several other topics were discussed. Steve Lafreniere discussed the numbers of children covered by medicaid in Alabama versus other states in the country and how poorly funded our medicaid system is in this state. Eddie Finn discussed the difficulty in finding service providers for ASD in the state. Ryan Donaldson discussed the feasibility of a sliding scale basis healthcare coverage model that some states have implemented. Spencer Lee and Libby Williams added information regarding the financial difficulties of supporting ASD children. Both indicated that change is needed to support these families.

The committee as a whole agreed to meet in the fall in Birmingham, possibly at Glenwood's campus. The committee would like to further delineate the 6 issues stated above.

Submitted by  
Bama Hager, Healthcare Subcommittee Chair  
8/28/08