

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE MASSACHUSETTS AUTISM COMMISSION REPORT

MARCH 2013



The entire report including the state agency and
subcommittee reports is available online at
www.mass.gov/hhs/autismcommission.

III EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of the Legislative Commission

The Special Commission Relative to Autism was established by Legislative Resolve and approved by Governor Deval Patrick on April 22, 2010. The Mission of the bipartisan Commission was “To investigate and study current support and services, identify gaps and make recommendations for strategies that will support the development of appropriate, collaborative and timely supports and services across the lifespan of individuals on the [autism] spectrum.”

The mission charged the Commission to focus on:

- Best practices
- Increased coordination among state agencies
- Maximization of federal reimbursement and other resources
- Approaches to better serve individuals on the spectrum and their families

Per the Legislative Resolve, the Commission was directed to focus its work on issues affecting all individuals on the autism spectrum, including, but not limited to, classic autism, Asperger’s syndrome, High Functioning Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorder, not otherwise specified. The Resolve directed the Commission to investigate issues including, but not limited to:

- Coordination of state human service agencies
- Issues related to access for families of children with autism spectrum disorders and adults who are from linguistically and culturally diverse communities
- Provision of adult human services
- Behavioral services based on best practices to ensure emotional well-being
- Mental health services
- Public education
- Mechanisms to ensure maximization of federal reimbursement
- Post-secondary education
- Job attainment and employment, including supported employment
- Housing
- Independent living
- Community participation
- Social and recreational opportunities

Throughout its work, the Commission has focused on developing recommendations related to these issues.

Process

Acknowledging the broad range and diversity of issues and needs affecting individuals on the autism spectrum throughout their lifespan, the Commission established sub-committees to provide the opportunity for in-depth analyses and the development of recommendations on specific issues affecting the following groups:

- Birth – Five
- School Age
- Transition to Adulthood
- Adults

Sub-committees were chaired by leaders in the Autism Community who were joined by numerous professionals, parents, self-advocates, and others with specific interests and expertise in these areas.

State Agencies from four Secretariats were represented on the Commission and these representatives served as valuable resources to the citizen members. The findings and recommendations were ultimately independently formulated by the citizen members and do not imply the endorsement of any specific agency or the Patrick Administration.¹

More than forty personal experiences and stories were also submitted by members of the public at the request of the Commission. These vignettes describe how lives have been impacted by autism, (both positively and negatively), concerns, frustrations, hopes and aspirations and they have been inserted throughout the report to illustrate some of the key findings and recommendations of the Commission.

¹State Agency representatives have appreciated the opportunity to be active participants in the Commission proceedings and look forward to continuing their work with this group, but have recused themselves from any of the final decisions on the findings and recommendations that are included in this report since most of the recommendations are for action steps to be taken by the Administration. Upon the filing of the Report, the state agencies will share the recommendations with others in the Administration and determine what action steps are possible. The Administration has deep appreciation for the dedicated and comprehensive work that went into this effort as well as the spirit of the recommendations and looks forward to its continued work with the Commission on this critical issue.

Using the State Agency reports and the work of the sub-committees as a foundation, the Commission prioritized its findings and recommendations into the following thirteen categories:

AUTISM COMMISSION PRIORITIES

1. Expand eligibility criteria for the Department of Developmental Services so that individuals with autism who have IQs over 70 and have substantial functional limitations have access to services.
2. Assure that those with autism and a co-occurring mental health condition have equal access to and appropriate services from the Department of Mental Health.
3. Expand intensive services in the home and community for individuals with autism through the Children's Autism Medicaid Waiver, the Adult Medicaid Waivers, and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education/Department of Developmental Services Residential Placement Prevention Program.
4. Expand insurance coverage for autism treatments
5. Increase and fortify supports and resources that make it possible to maintain the family unit and assist individuals with autism to live in the community.
6. Determine the number of people with autism in Massachusetts and their support needs by implementing a plan for consistent statewide data collection.
7. Improve access to autism screening, diagnosis, and Autism Specialty Services through Early Intervention for children diagnosed with autism and those considered at high risk for autism.
8. Increase employment opportunities for individuals with autism by providing a range of job training, job development, and employment opportunities.
9. Increase capacity to provide educational supports and services necessary to meet the needs of all students with autism.
10. Increase availability of augmentative and alternative communication methods, devices and services for individuals with autism.
11. Increase the range of housing options for individuals with autism.
12. Improve the delivery of healthcare services for individuals with autism.
13. Assure that the Autism Commission's Recommendations are implemented and outcomes are monitored for effectiveness.

The Recommendations are diverse and extensive. It is understood and acknowledged that implementation of many of these recommendations will require legislative actions, statutory changes and/or financial resources and that some will take more time to implement than others. They are, by intent, broad and ambitious. But collectively, they represent a vision and blueprint for Massachusetts to address the needs of all individuals and families affected by autism.