

Programs for Individuals with Autism

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Issue

This report describes eligibility and enrollment for programs provided by or through the departments of Social Services (DSS), Children and Families (DCF), and Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) and other state agencies for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Summary

As the state's Medicaid agency, DSS generally serves individuals with ASD through a waiver and through the Medicaid state plan. The Lifespan Waiver provides home- and community-based services to individuals with ASD. As of May 2018, there are 97 active clients in the Lifespan Waiver and 1,321 individuals on the waitlist. Other autism services under the Medicaid state plan are provided as part of the state's Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) requirements for Medicaid enrollees under age 21. According to DSS, over the last three years, over 2,700 people have received authorization for ASD services through EPSDT requirements. As these services are included under the Medicaid State Plan, there is no waitlist.

According to DCF staff, the vast majority of DCF children who receive autism related services are served by Beacon Health Options, the behavioral health administrative service organization for the state's Medicaid program. DCF may refer children with ASD in its Voluntary Services Program to DSS's Lifespan waiver when a slot is available and DSS reserves slots for this purpose.

Generally, DDS and DMHAS do not have programs specifically for individuals with ASD, but serve such individuals if they have a primary diagnosis that falls within the scope of their programs.

The Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) generally administers programs for individuals with disabilities and those with ASD may qualify. DORS administers the state's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, which helps people with disabilities obtain, maintain, or advance in competitive, integrated employment, and includes a component for students. According to DORS staff, in federal fiscal year 2017, VR had 842 open cases with individuals whose primary or secondary diagnosis is ASD. As of June 2018, there is no waitlist. DORS also administers a smaller, state-funded Employment Opportunities Program (EOP) that serves individuals with disabilities working in supported competitive integrated employment who are not eligible for other programs. Finally, DORS' Bureau of Disability Determination Services makes disability determinations for individuals seeking to obtain federal disability benefits (i.e., Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)). Individuals with ASD may qualify if they meet certain criteria.

DSS

Lifespan Waiver

DSS's Waiver for Persons with Autism, also known as the Lifespan Waiver, is a 1915(c) Medicaid waiver. This type of waiver allows states to use Medicaid funding to provide home- and community-based services that are not generally available to the broader population of Medicaid recipients under the Medicaid State Plan. Unlike state plan services, states can cap waiver services and limit waiver enrollment.

DSS describes eligibility criteria for the Lifespan Waiver on [its website](#). Among other things, in order to be eligible for the waiver, individuals must:

1. have a primary diagnosis of ASD supported by a standardized diagnostic test;
2. have substantial limitations in two or more areas of major life activity (e.g., self-care, learning, or mobility);
3. be otherwise Medicaid eligible (i.e., for HUSKY A, C, or D), including meeting applicable income and asset limits; and
4. be at least 3 years of age with an IQ of at least 70 (i.e., not have an intellectual disability).

Enrollment

According to DSS, as of May 2018, there are 97 active clients in the Lifespan Waiver and 1,321 individuals on the waitlist. Five slots per year are reserved for children transitioning from DCF's Voluntary Services Program (see below) and two slots per year are reserved for Money Follows the Person participants.

Services under the waiver are capped at \$50,000 annually per person and include the following:

1. clinical behavioral supports,
2. social skills group,
3. job coaching,
4. life skills coach,
5. community mentor,
6. individual goods and services,
7. personal emergency response system,
8. respite,
9. assistive technology,
10. interpreter,
11. non-medical transportation,
12. specialized driving assessment, and
13. live-in companion.

Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT)

Generally, under federal law, certain services are mandatory for state Medicaid programs to cover, while others are optional. For Medicaid enrollees under age 21, states must provide additional EPSDT services, which include various screening, vision, dental, and hearing services.

Under 2014 [guidelines](#) from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), states must cover EPSDT screening and medically necessary services for individuals with ASD. According to DSS, it began covering autism services under the Medicaid State Plan in January 2015 for individuals under age 21 enrolled in Husky A, C, and D. Services include:

1. comprehensive diagnostic evaluation,
2. assessment,
3. care plan development,
4. program book,
5. direct observation and direction of a technician,
6. direct intervention and treatment services, and
7. group social building.

Enrollment

According to DSS, over the last three years, over 2,700 people have received authorization for ASD services through EPSDT requirements. As these services are included under the Medicaid State Plan, there is no waitlist.

HUSKY B, the state's Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), does not cover these services.

Family Support Services

Beacon Health Options, the behavioral health administrative service organization for the state's Medicaid program, provides family support services to the families of Medicaid members. Unlike the EPSDT services described above, these services are not Medicaid-funded and are available to families regardless of the age of the person with ASD. According to [Beacon](#), family support services connect families with information and referrals, provide coaching support, and teach families about the ASD diagnosis, available treatments, coping strategies, and advocacy information.

DCF

According to DCF staff, the majority of DCF children who receive autism services are served by Beacon Health Options, which manages ASD evaluations and treatment options for Medicaid enrolled members under the age of 21.

DCF can refer children from their Voluntary Services Program to the DSS Lifespan Waiver (see above). The DCF Voluntary Services Program provides, at the request of the family, casework, community referrals, and treatment services for children and youth with serious emotional disturbances, mental illnesses, substance dependency, or behavioral health needs. Children and youths do not have to be committed to DCF to receive voluntary services. DSS reserves five slots per year for children transitioning from this program to the Lifespan Waiver. According to DCF staff, in 2017, three slots became available in the waiver for DCF voluntary services clients.

Enrollment

According to a 2014 Program Review and Investigation (PRI) report, in FY 14, DMHAS served over 107,900 clients, 712 of whom had a co-occurring ASD diagnosis (less than 1%)([see Appendix D](#)).

DMHAS

According to DMHAS staff, while the agency has no specific programs for individuals with ASD, it will serve them if they have a primary diagnosis that falls within the scope of their services. DMHAS's primary focus is mental health and addiction services for adults (i.e., age 18 and older).

Other Agencies

Department of Developmental Services (DDS)

Among other things, [PA 16-3 \(§§ 47-60 & 63\), May Special Session](#) made DSS, rather than DDS, the lead agency for purposes of coordinating state agency functions that have responsibility for ASD services. It also moved the Division of ASD Services from DDS to DSS. According to DDS staff, the

transition of autism services from DDS to DSS is complete and DDS no longer has programs that specifically serve individuals with ASD, but DDS psychologists may continue to make certain determinations as to whether an individual qualifies for the Lifespan Waiver described above. Like DMHAS, the agency serves individuals with ASD if they have a primary diagnosis that falls within the scope of their programs (e.g., an intellectual disability co-occurring with ASD).

Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)

Vocational Rehabilitation and Level Up

The federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) oversees state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs, which are funded through a federal grant and matching state funds. In Connecticut, DORS administers the state's VR program in accordance with federal law and regulations (Title I of the 1973 federal Rehabilitation Act). Within DORS, the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) serves legally blind adults ([CGS § 10-306](#) et seq.) and the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) serves all other individuals with disabilities ([CGS § 17b-650](#) et seq.).

Enrollment

According to DORS, 5,703 people are currently receiving BRS VR and Level Up services. In federal fiscal year 2017, VR had 842 open cases in which the individual had ASD as a primary or secondary diagnosis. As of June 2018, there is no waitlist.

Generally, the VR program helps people with disabilities, including ASD, obtain, maintain, or advance in competitive, integrated employment. To be eligible for VR, an individual must have a disability that is a barrier to employment and require VR services. VR is not a means-tested program (i.e., there are no income or asset limits). For more information on VR generally, see [OLR Report 2016-R-0251](#).

Under federal law, states must use a portion of their VR funding to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services to students ages 16 to 21 with disabilities, including ASD. In Connecticut, DORS provides these services under [Level Up](#). These services are separate from, and in addition to, transition services required under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Enrollment

EOP currently serves 165 students and as of June 2018, there is no waitlist. Individuals with ASD are eligible.

Employment Opportunities Program

DORS' Employment Opportunities Program (EOP) is a state-funded program, separate from VR, that provides ongoing job coach support to individuals with disabilities working in supported competitive integrated employment. Individuals eligible for other sources of support, including DSS services, are

ineligible for EOP, even if they are not receiving DSS services due to an enrollment cap and waitlist. EOP is not a means-tested program.

Disability Determinations Services

DORS' Bureau of Disability Determination Services determines the medical eligibility of Connecticut residents who have applied for cash benefits under SSI or SSDI, which are federal disability programs administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA). Under SSA's eligibility criteria, individuals with ASD are eligible if they have:

1. medical documentation of (a) qualitative deficits in verbal communication, nonverbal communication, and social interaction and (b) significantly restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities; and
2. extreme limitation of one, or marked limitation of two, of certain areas of mental functioning, including interacting with others and understanding, remembering, or applying information.

Enrollment

Overall, approximately 64,600 people received SSI benefits in Connecticut in December 2016 and approximately 90,000 people received SSDI benefits that year. Enrollment numbers for individuals with ASD were not immediately available.

Resources

Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee, Connecticut General Assembly, ["Transitional Services for Youth and Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder."](#) December 2014

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, CMCS Informational Bulletin, ["Clarification of Medicaid Coverage of Services to Children with Autism,"](#) July 7, 2014

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