



# Nebraska Autism Overview

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Act Early Region VII Summit

Kansas City, Missouri

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# Nebraska Act Early Team Members

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- Cindy Ellis, M.D., Behavioral Pediatrician, UNMC Munroe-Meyer Institute (Team Leader)
- Teresa Coonts, Nebraska Department of Education, Special Populations
- Barbara Schliesser, Nebraska Department of Education, Early Intervention, Part C Manager
- Chrissy McNair, Parent Advocate, Member of FEAT of NE, Autism Spectrum Network..

- Torri Smith Tejral, Rural Behavioral Health Network Practitioner
- Tonna Gilbert, Quality Assurance Specialist, Head Start C&FDP, Inc.
- Wayne Fisher, Director, MMI Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Kathy Anderson, M.D., Rural Pediatrician, Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council, Region 9 Preschool Interagency Council
- Jan Thelen, Nebraska Department of Education, Section 619

- Bridget Cannon-Hale, Director of Programming, GWR Sunshine Foundation
- Nina Baker, PTI Nebraska
- Roger Keetle, Office of Senator Joel Johnson, Dist. 37
- Laura Maddox, State Coordinator, Nebraska Autism Regional Network
- Amy Bunnell, Nebraska Dept. of Health and Human Services, part C
- Kellie Ellerbusch, State Team Coordinator, UNMC Munroe-Meyer Institute

# Nebraska Systems Overview

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## ■ State Demographics

- Population: 1,768,331
- 91.8% White, 4.4% African-American, 7.4% Latino/Hispanic
- 10% Urban, 60% Rural, 30% Frontier
  - 72% live in a town of 1,000 people or less



# First Points of Contact for Families with Suspected ASD

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- Medical/Behavioral Health Practitioners
- School System
  - Local School Districts
  - Early Development Network
  - ASD Network
- Migrant programs
- Head Start / Early Head Start / Even Start
- Hospital-based nurse home visitation programs

# Assessment & Diagnostic Services

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- Munroe-Meyer Institute
  - Autism Diagnostic and Consultation Clinic
  - Developmental Pediatrics/Interdisciplinary Clinics
  - Behavioral Psychology and Rural Behavioral Health Network
- Local medical and/or behavioral health care provider (public and private)
- UNL Barkley Center (in development)

# Assessment & Diagnostic Services

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- School System
  - Local School Districts
  - Early Development Network
  - ASD Network
- ASD Network (funded by NDE) provides technical assistance to MDT/IEP teams



# Early Intervention Services

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- Munroe-Meyer Institute
  - Speech and Language
  - Autism Center Early Intervention Program
  - Outpatient Behavioral Health
- School System
  - Local School Districts
  - Early Development Network
  - ASD Network
- Local Service Providers
  - Autism Center of Nebraska

# Organizations and Coordination

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- Nebraska Department of Education
- Local School Districts and Educational Service Units (ESUs)
- Head Start, Early Start, Even Start
- Department of Health and Human Services
- MMI and University Programs
- Local Service Providers
- Nebraska Unicameral
- GWR Sunshine Foundation
- Advocacy Organizations
- Behavioral Health Regional Network

\* Limited coordination among some organizations but not all inclusive

# Promising and Effective Practices

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- Families involvement in advocacy, service coordination, and policy decisions
  - Instrumental in the promotion of LB 482, a Medicaid waiver to provide behavior therapy to children with ASD
- NDE and DHHS fund statewide and regional early childhood training and technical assistance based on best practices to support children in natural and inclusive environments
  - Early Childhood Training Center
  - Early Childhood Planning Regions

# Promising and Effective Practices

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- ASD Network offers wide variety of training and onsite technical assistance
  - Developing effective practices for all children with ASD
  - Developing capacity of school districts to educate all team members about autism
  - Skills and knowledge base of regional coordinators and state coordinator as well as local district personnel

# Promising and Effective Practices

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- Nebraska is setting a trend in using private funds to match state funds for a wide variety of services
- MMI is a statewide resource in Nebraska with outreach in rural areas
  - MMI's Center on ASD is piloting an internet screening tool for parents
- Professional Partner Program
- Integrated Care Coordination Unit

# Challenges to and Gaps in the System

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- Disparity between eligibility, funding, and services in the educational, behavioral health, and medical systems
- Inconsistent access to summer programs, social skills training, respite care, integrated play programs, responsive classrooms, private providers, etc.
- Migrant, impoverished, and rural populations
- Insurance, transportation, & translation services

# Challenges to and Gaps in the System

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- Too few professionals/service providers who specialize in ASD
- Long and discouraging waiting lists for medical assessments
- Inconsistent use of standard screening/ assessment practices/tools
- Families need information about resources
- Insurance in Nebraska typically does not fund anything coded under Autism

# Current Realities in Nebraska

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- The Governor does not support increases in state funding
- Proposed State Legislation
  - LB 55 - increase funding for home visitation, child screening, early intervention, and parenting education programs
  - LB 482 - Medicaid waiver to provide behavior therapy to children with ASD
  - LB 483 - appropriate monies for the Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders at UNMC for research and demonstration project
  - LB 1018 - adopt the Children's Behavioral Health Transformation and Prioritization Appropriations Act
- Congressman Fortenberry is interested in Autism and forming a group to look into legislation at the federal level



# Next Steps for Nebraska

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- Insurance coverage for ASD therapy
- Clearinghouse for ALL resources (no silos)
- Implementing empirically-based interventions as best practices
- The state Medicaid system, NDE, schools, health care providers, and private organizations working together to ensure seamless service delivery

# Wish List for Nebraska

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- Increase funding of the ASD Network for the purpose of enhancing the skills of educators and families in the area of autism
- Insurance reform on a federal level
- University Level Autism Certification/Endorsement
- One-Stop resource center for information and referrals