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Essential Health Benefits for the Patient Protection & Affordable Care Act.

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New Jersey's prevalence rate of autism spectrum disorders is one of the highest in the nation. Since its incorporation as a nonprofit information and advocacy agency in 1965, Autism New Jersey (formerly COSAC) has been a source of credible, reliable information regarding autism and autism intervention for NJ's autism community.

In 1999, the Surgeon General reported, "Thirty years of research (have) demonstrated the efficacy of applied behavioral methods in reducing inappropriate behavior and in increasing communication, learning, and appropriate social behavior." Consistent with this report, Autism New Jersey has long endorsed evidence-based treatment as essential to individuals with autism throughout the lifespan. Behavioral interventions that incorporate applied behavior analysis (ABA) treatment strategies are now widely accepted in New Jersey.

In 2009, Autism New Jersey partnered with Autism Speaks and several state agencies serving individuals with developmental disabilities to successfully pass insurance reform that included coverage for behavior treatment. This law provides coverage for approximately 30% of NJ residents with autism. With inclusion of ABA services in Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), many more desperate parents in NJ's autism community who are not covered by state-regulated insurance plans could access financial reimbursement for medically necessary intervention for their children with autism.

About 1% of the population of the United States is affected by autism according the Center for Disease Control (CDC). As many as 3 million individuals and their families will be impacted by the definition of what services constitute "essential" health benefits.

Autism New Jersey supports Autism Speaks and 20 other national organizations that form the Habilitation Benefits Coalition. The Coalition believes that rehabilitative and habilitative services and devices should be provided under private insurance to address functional deficits in patients regardless of the person's condition or diagnosis.

Of the ten general categories of essential health benefits described in section 1302(b) of the ACA, two are most important for autism: “mental health and substance use disorder services, including behavioral health treatment” (section 1302(b)(1)(E)); and “rehabilitative and habilitative services and devices” (section 1302(b)(1)(G)).

Extensive research indicates that evidence-based strategies based upon the principles of applied behavior analysis are effective and should be considered essential within the provision of behavioral health treatment.

Habilitation services and devices are critical to the health and well-being of people with autism, and Autism New Jersey urges the Secretary to cover habilitation services and devices in parity with rehabilitation coverage.

During nearly its fifty years of information provision to families affected by autism in our state, Autism New Jersey has been governed and guided by many of the most prominent professionals in the field of autism treatment. In addition, the input of parents has been an ongoing and critical facet of agency policy. We hope our collective voice is heard loud and clear: please include these essential health benefits on behalf of individuals with autism.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert Titus". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Robert Titus
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