



BUDGET – 88th Texas Legislative Session

Autism Society of Texas

supports funding the following initiatives and programs.

Autism Medicaid Services Program – The Autism Medicaid Services Program (AMS Program) was created by Rider in the 86th Legislative Session without a funding stream. However, in the 87th Legislature, a Rider was adopted that included both funding (\$112 million in General Revenue (GR) for the biennium) and a directive to HHSC to implement the program by the date certain of February 1, 2022.

HHSC created and implemented program services in the spring of 2022. Unfortunately, as a program under Goal A. *Medicaid Client Services*, there is little associated information to understand the funding and goals for the AMS Program. This is in stark contrast to most other programs that have Strategies and Goals, clearly defined budget amounts, and the expected numbers of people served documented.

In addition, it is unclear how much of the \$112 million in GR has been spent in the current biennium, what the federal match may have been, and how many children were served in the past year. In fact, the implementation of the AMS Program has not been smooth and while HHSC has worked with a variety of providers, there is no public forum for feedback or to address implementation questions or concerns.

The Autism Society of Texas (AST) requests (based on existing and historical data*) that at a minimum the Autism Medicaid Services Program receive sufficient funding for 2024 and 2025 that will serve all children with autism who qualify for the program. AST suggests that:

Session	Budget Yr.	Proposed	Funded
86 th	2020-2021	\$192M AF	\$0
87 th	2022-2023	\$0	\$112M GR
88 th	2024-2025	\$140M GR	?

- Allocate \$70 million in GR per year. (**\$140 million GR** per biennium). Approximately \$224 million AF for the program based on non-pandemic FMAP.
- Add a **reporting mechanism** to ensure that HHSC collects and disseminates data on how much is being spent on the program (both GR and AF), how many children are being served per year, and costs per client.
- **Create an advisory committee** made up of a broad group of interested parties is necessary to address problems and concerns with the program.

* A variety of advocates have been unable to obtain this important information from HHSC despite good faith and repeated efforts. Therefore, based on the only existing data in HHSC’s 2018 LAR, an Exceptional Item request to “Provide Intensive Behavioral Intervention for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder” estimated approximately \$77 million in GR pulls down an additional \$115 million in federal matching funds for a total of approximately \$192 million All-Funds (AF) requested for the program. Unfortunately, the exceptional item was not funded in the state budget for those years.

12.33% increase to the State Budget:

AST requests that every budget item for human services and special education services receive a similar increase to the adopted 12.33% economic growth rate. Many services in HB1 and SB 1 (as filed) are consistent with the HHSC and TEA LAR's and have not been adjusted upward for the 12.33% for increases for case growth, inflation, and state employee salaries when necessary.

Children's Autism Program – Strategy D.1.6, Autism Program. Article II

The proposed budget amounts in HB1 and SB 1 are consistent with HHSC's LAR request. Unfortunately, these amounts do not provide funding for case growth from previous funding. Stagnant or flat funding is unacceptable for this valuable program that helps so many families that do not have private insurance but also do not qualify for Medicaid.

HB 1 and SB 1: \$6.8 million per year and \$13.6 million per biennium
With the growth rate multiplier - **~\$15.28 million per biennium**

Program Description: In contrast to the more intensive Autism Medicaid Services Program where only children and families who receive Medicaid may qualify "The Children's Autism Program provides focused applied behavior analysis (ABA) treatment services to children ages 3-15 years with a diagnosis on the autism spectrum. ABA is a treatment that uses behavioral principles to evaluate and teach socially relevant behavior and new skills and increase desirable behaviors through positive reinforcement. ABA services are customized to the individual child's needs based on an assessment and a treatment plan. Services may take place in the home, a clinic, or familiar settings in the community."

Other Important Issues:

Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) – is always underfunded for the amount of need. Both the budgeted amounts in HB 1 and SB 1 and the funding listed in the exceptional item continue to decrease the per-client reimbursement amount. Adding in the growth rate of 12.33% will help address the increase in caseloads and inflation to more adequately reimburse providers.

Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine (TCHAT) – is an extremely important program that provides telemedicine or telehealth programs to school districts to help identify and assess the behavioral health needs of students and provide access to mental health services. Expanding this program will be beneficial today and in the future.

Increase wages for Community Care Attendants - Care Attendants, also known as Personal Assistance Service (PAS) workers, are a crucial part of the community services workforce. In alignment with many disability advocacy groups, AST requests Care Attendant wages be raised to a minimum of **\$15/hr.** (2024) with another increase to **\$17/hr.** in year 2 of the budget (2025). AST also requests a method to increase wages based on inflation for the foreseeable future.

- Estimated General Revenue - **\$2.6 Billion for the biennium**



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Medicaid Waiver Interest Lists

The Medicaid Waiver Interests List has consistently grown and been underfunded for decades. Families and individuals (approximately 156,543) sign up for the Interest Lists and then wait to receive services for as much as 15-16 years (based on December 31, 2022 data). The Texas Legislature's efforts to address this issue by allocating a small number of waiver slots have fallen short with more families and individuals signing up on the lists than have received services or have been removed.

- AST requests that the Texas Legislature address the Interest List with innovative solutions in partnership with increased spending to provide qualifying children and adults with the services and supports they need to live in community settings.