



Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) Caring for over 6 million people affected in the U.S.

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is characterized by challenges with communication, social skills and restricted or repetitive behaviors. The prevalence rate for autism is climbing¹; it is currently estimated that 1 in 54 children have autism. The cause of ASD is unknown and there is currently no cure for it. For most, autism is a lifelong condition. However, research shows that early diagnosis (as young as 14 months²) and intervention can improve a child's development.

The impact on families and society

Autism comes with a high social, personal, and financial cost³. Twenty-five percent of mothers of children with autism report that they have had to take a leave of absence from work in the last year due to their child's special needs and almost as many report that they have had to turn down a promotion for the same reason. Caregivers of children with autism face a wide array of challenges such as decreased ability to work⁴, impaired mental⁵ and physical health⁶ and higher stress levels⁷. Across an individual's lifespan, autism can cost as much as \$2.4 million.

New Directions innovative solutions

Choosing the right services to meet the needs of a child with autism can be difficult. New Directions has a large network of top-quality providers who can help children and caregivers reach their fullest potential. The New Directions Autism Resource Program (ARP) is staffed by behavior analysts and social workers who quickly match children and caregivers with the specialty providers who are best suited to meet their needs.

“My New Directions care manager and provider relations representative are so helpful. I really get the sense that their priority is all about the kids and the provider; we discuss things together and make the best decisions. I just want to let you know how great the whole team is and how happy I am to keep being a provider under their direction.”

The New Directions ARP is comprised of passionate, skilled clinical experts who excel at making sure that families get high-quality treatment, led by a leadership team of nationally recognized experts in the autism field. New Directions has developed a thoughtful, clinically sound model to serve our members.

- A model that is based upon collaboration with members and providers.
- A multidisciplinary team of clinical experts, including behavior analysts, clinical social workers and psychiatrists.
- Medical policies that are based on best practice standards published by industry leaders and approved by a panel of top-quality providers.
- Program development input from a committee of high-quality, in-network Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) providers who provide expertise on topics such as best practice, medical policy and areas of needed provider and member education.

A partner in the journey

Raising a child on the spectrum can be difficult. A New Directions care manager can make it easier by ensuring that families can access treatment without unnecessary barriers. The ARP care management services include education, concierge support and care coordination. Throughout the course of treatment, a New Directions care manager will talk with the family and their providers about how New Directions can help them achieve their long-term goals.

Parent training

One of the most important aspects of autism treatment is parent involvement. New Directions supports treatment plans that involve the family in all stages of goal setting and treatment. A high-quality treatment plan includes time for the provider to work directly with the parents or caregivers, teaching families new skills for supporting their child.

Parent training is an integral component of ABA treatment and service delivery. During these training sessions, families meet directly with the Board Certified Behavior Analyst® (BCBA) practitioner to review the treatment plan and practice ways to implement the interventions that have been recommended. The practice to implement the treatment plan can occur via role-play with the BCBA followed by direct practice between caregivers and the child. This direct practice allows families to use behavioral strategies in real time. Examples of strategies that can be taught to families may include:

- Increasing the child’s ability to ask for his/her favorite item or activity.
- Increasing the child’s ability to follow instructions during self-care routines.
- Teaching ways to manage and effectively respond to challenging behaviors.

Parent training helps families understand and consistently implement the BCBA’s recommended treatment interventions. However, a child’s circle of support may extend beyond the parents. In these instances, extended family members and

“I am thankful that New Directions is easy to get ahold of with questions. Staff is easy to talk with about my issues and concerns; they are also knowledgeable and helpful too.”

any other individuals who provide care to the child are encouraged to participate in training sessions. This ensures everyone who is involved in the child’s care can effectively teach new skills or respond to challenging behaviors consistently. While it is important for children to learn new skills with the BCBA and Registered Behavior Technician® (RBT), parent training ensures they can demonstrate these skills with their parents and other caregivers across a variety of settings outside of treatment sessions (e.g., home, grocery stores, restaurants).

Network solutions

Telehealth

New Directions strongly supports the use of telehealth to increase access to top-quality care. Telehealth is not a distinct service but is a model for healthcare delivery that approximates face-to-face care. New Directions has extensive expertise in guiding telehealth providers to deliver services that adhere to best practice standards.

Caregiver satisfaction

New Directions manages over 7,000 members with ASD each year. Caregivers express a high level of satisfaction with the services that they and their child receive:

92% are satisfied with how rapidly they are able to see their provider after the intake process.

90% are satisfied with how much their provider involves them in treatment.

92% are satisfied with the way that their provider explains things to them.

94% state that their child was helped by the services that they received.

85% state that their child’s social skills have improved in the last 12 months due to treatment.

85% state that their child is better able to cope with daily problems due to the treatment that he/she has received in the last 12 months.

References

1. Xu, G., Strathearn, L., Liu B., O'Brien M., Kopelman T. G., Zhu J., et al. (2019). Prevalence and treatment patterns of autism spectrum disorder in the United States, 2016. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 173, 153–159. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2018.4208>
2. Pierce K, Gazestani VH, Bacon E, et al. (2019). Evaluation of the Diagnostic Stability of the Early Autism Spectrum Disorder Phenotype in the General Population Starting at 12 Months. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 173(6), 578–587. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.0624>
3. Zuvekas, S.H., Grosse, S.D., Lavelle, T.A. et al. (2021). Healthcare Costs of Pediatric Autism Spectrum Disorder in the United States, 2003–2015. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 51, 2950–2958. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04704-z>
4. Callander, E. J., & Lindsay, D. B. (2018). The impact of childhood autism spectrum disorder on parent's labour force participation: Can parents be expected to be able to re-join the labour force? *Autism*, 22(5), 542–548. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361316688331>
5. Lushkin, V., O'Brien, K.H. (2016). Parental Mental Health: Addressing the Unmet needs of Caregivers for Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2016.09.507>
6. Dykens, E. M., & Lambert, W. (2013). Trajectories of diurnal cortisol in mothers of children with autism and other developmental disabilities: relations to health and mental health. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, 43(10), 2426–2434. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-013-1791-1>
7. Seymour, M., Giallo, R., & Wood, C. E. (2018). Bio-ecological factors associated with the psychological distress of fathers of children with autism spectrum disorder: A population-based study of Australian families. *Autism*, 22(7), 825–836. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361317709971>