

Iowa Autism Support Program Overview

Revised December 2023

The Autism Support Program (ASP) provides state funding for applied behavior analysis (ABA) services to children who are not eligible to receive ABA service funding through Medicaid or private health insurers and who meet certain diagnostic and financial eligibility criteria.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS - A child is eligible to receive assistance through ASP if:

- the child is under the age of fourteen (14) at the time of application
- the child has a diagnosis on the Autism spectrum made by a child psychiatrist, developmental pediatrician, or a clinical psychologist within 24 months of the date of application
- the child does not qualify for Medicaid
- the child does not have coverage available for ABA services through any private insurance carrier
- the child's family meets the income guidelines for the program (household income at or below 500% of the federal poverty level (FPL))

FAMILY COST SHARE - Families of children enrolled in this program may have a cost share (co-pay) based on income. Families with household incomes up to 200% of FPL have no cost share. Families with household incomes over 200% of FPL will have a cost share depending on family income. The family cost share ranges from 0.5% to 15% of the service cost. The cost share can be waived if a family can demonstrate financial hardship.

BENEFIT LIMITATIONS - ASP benefits are limited. They are available to an eligible child for a period of up to 24 months. The maximum benefit amount is \$36,000 per year.

ABA PROVIDERS - The program administrator maintains a list of Department-approved autism service providers who are qualified to provide ABA services under the ASP and have joined our provider network. Other qualified ABA providers may be enrolled in the provider network if they are enrolled as an Iowa Medicaid provider of ABA or are willing to become enrolled as an Iowa Medicaid provider. Services must be pre-authorized before they can be paid for with ASP funding.

OTHER ASSISTANCE - Once you apply for ASP, you will also be referred to the Iowa Regional Autism Assistance Program (RAP) of the Child Health Specialty Clinics which can assist families with system navigation, care coordination or other autism-related needs. RAP teams are located in regional centers across the state and are available to provide services free-of-charge to families in all 99 counties.

TO APPLY FOR ASP - For more information or to apply for the program, contact the ASP administrator, Connie Fanselow, by email at: cfansel@dhs.state.ia.us (email is the preferred method of communication) or call 515-201-1365 to request an application. You can also leave a message by calling 515-281-7277.

SUMMARY OF STATE FISCAL YEAR 2023 DATA FROM ANNUAL REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

- Fourteen applications were received for the ASP during SFY23 (up from nine in SFY22).
- Nine (64%) of the 14 applications received during SFY23 were approved. Three applications were denied because the child had a private insurance benefit for ABA (with a high out-of-pocket cost share) and two were denied because the child was eligible for Medicaid coverage.
- A total of \$259,489 was expended during SFY23 for ABA service reimbursements to providers. This represents an increase of 10% over SFY22. Expenditures increased 88% from SFY21 to SFY22, and 92% from SFY20 to SFY21. SFY20 and SFY21 expenditures were unusually low due to the public health emergency (PHE).
- Applications to the program continue to increase - for each of the years 2014 through 2017, an average of 28 applications for assistance through ASP were received. For the first four years since the insurance mandate for ABA coverage went into effect in January 2018, that number had gone down to an average of 10 per year, but now shows an uptick. Families report that the increase in private insurance coverage has limited application numbers, although the new private insurance benefit available is sometimes insufficient to effectively provide access to needed services.
- The average amount of ASP funds expended per month during SFY23 was \$21,624.
- The average monthly cost for ABA services paid from the ASP fund per participant for SFY23 (after the family cost share is applied) is \$2,883.
- The average monthly service cost share paid by families is \$130 (which represents 4.50% of the monthly cost).
- No administrative costs were charged to the program funds during the fiscal year because Iowa HHS staff directly managed the program.
- No individuals have been placed on a waiting list due to program funding constraints. Individuals who have been found eligible for ASP funding are sometimes placed on waiting lists with provider agencies due to lack of provider capacity.
- ASP funding has been sufficient to serve all eligible individuals to date.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION for the period from the start of the program in April 2014 through June 2023:

- Iowa HHS has received and processed a total of 146 applications.
- A total of 84 children have received ABA services through the program.
- 16% of applicants have been female and 84% have been male.
- The average age of an ASP applicant is 4.50 years.
- The average income of an ASP applicant's family is 285% FPL.

- The average length of time a child receives ASP services is 14 months (well below the program maximum benefit period of 24 months).
- The average total amount of ASP funds spent for each child served is \$32,408 (well below the program maximum of \$72,000).

SNAPSHOT OF THE AVERAGE PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

- The average ASP participant for FY23 is a 4-and-a-half-year-old boy, who has one sibling and comes from a family with an annual income of about \$81,500 (or a gross income of \$6792 per month).
- Usually only one parent in the household works full time as they have young children and the child with autism requires extra care and attention and is often difficult to place in daycare.
- The family has often spent two years or more getting a diagnosis for their child, finding a provider who is willing and able to provide ABA services in their area, and finding a source of funding.
- The total cost of ABA services pursuant to a professional treatment plan to the child averages nearly \$4000 per month.

ASP BRIDGES A GAP IN THE SERVICES SYSTEM

- Consistency and continuity are critical factors in the delivery of ABA services. It is noteworthy that ASP has been instrumental in “bridging the gap” so that the continuity of ABA services can be maintained when family circumstances are in flux.
- For example, ASP has provided support:
 - While a child is on the waiting list for a Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Waiver slot (receiving a slot initiates Medicaid eligibility).
 - When a child loses Medicaid coverage due to an increase in family income.
 - When families lose private insurance coverage because of a job layoff or have a waiting period for coverage when starting a new job, as well as when their policies do not offer an ABA benefit.
 - When a child is enrolled in HAWK-i (Healthy and Well Kids in Iowa), Iowa’s low-cost Children’s Health Insurance Plan (CHIP), which offers basic health insurance coverage but does not include an ABA benefit. Many ASP participants are enrolled with HAWK-i and do not have affordable access to other health insurance coverage.

PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

- Iowa HHS recommends continuation of the ASP program; however, program requirements need to be reviewed in light of shifts in the insurance marketplace since the program’s inception.
- Consideration should be given to both expanding access to insured families who are unable to afford the out-of-pocket expense and greater flexibility in benefit limitations to maximize utilization of available resources.
- Iowa HHS will continue to work to increase awareness of the program for families of children with a diagnosis of autism and professionals who work with children who have a diagnosis of autism, or are suspected of having autism, to ensure that lowans with ASD have the opportunity to reach their potential and live meaningful and productive lives alongside their fellow lowans.

THE COMPLETE SFY23 AUTISM SUPPORT PROGRAM REPORT to the Legislature is available at: [Microsoft Word - LR24-3I Autism Support Program 2023 Annual Report \(iowa.gov\)](#)