

# Ohio Interagency Work Group on Autism State Fiscal Year 2019 Report

Supporting Ohioans with Autism Across Agencies, Across the State,  
Across the Lifespan



July 2019

**Ohio**

Interagency Work  
Group on Autism

Ohio's Interagency Work Group on Autism (IWGA) was created in state law to "to improve the coordination of the state's efforts to address the service needs of individuals with autism spectrum disorders and the families of those individuals." (ORC 5123.0419)

The IWGA meets monthly and utilizes a collective impact framework to accomplish its work. Members include:

- Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (Lead Agency)
- OCALI (Convener)
- Ohio Department of Education
- Ohio Department of Health
- Ohio Department of Job and Family Services
- Ohio Department of Medicaid
- Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
- Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities

In May 2018, the IWGA released two documents: Policy Milestones and Pursuing Quality Lives.

[Policy Milestones](#), is a timeline of Ohio's key accomplishments, beginning in 2003 with the legislative task force that investigated the increase of autism in Ohio and gaps in service delivery, to present day policy and initiatives – reflecting the state's commitment to Ohioans with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

[Pursuing Quality Lives](#) (PQL) outlines the strategic priorities of the IWGA, and is based on the work of [Quality Lives](#), Ohio's original autism recommendations. PQL has served as the blueprint for the IWGA's work in State Fiscal Year 2019 (SFY2019).

The following report summarizes the work of the IWGA in SFY2019 and highlights planned priorities for State Fiscal Year 2020.



## GET A GOOD START

Identification and diagnosis can happen at any age and should occur at the first-suspected signs.

- The IWGA reviewed and discussed data related to Ohio's use of the Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit within Medicaid, and shared this data with teams from across the county at the [Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs' "Peer-to-Peer Exchange"](#).
- Ohio's Autism Diagnosis Education Program (ADEP) continues to lead efforts to significantly reduce both the average age of diagnosis and the time between initial concern and diagnosis. The IWGA discussed possible expansion of the Program and had the opportunity to share [ADEP's outcomes](#) with national partners.
- OCALI and state partners shared resources, launched social media campaigns, developed and provided training across and among systems. For example, training specific to autism was provided to agencies participating in the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Mobile Response and Stabilization Services Pilot.
- On behalf of the IWGA, OCALI's Office of Policy issued a family survey to get feedback on experiences around diagnosis, including whether or not families were linked to resources, what resources, and how long they had to wait in order to access services. The survey is being further analyzed and key findings will be issued.

## OBTAIN NEEDED SERVICES

Individuals with ASD should have access to high-quality services.

- IWGA members reviewed the federal definition of "underserved areas", discussed changes being proposed at the federal level, and are currently analyzing data based on this definition.
- The IWGA reviewed the latest information from [The Family Child Learning Center \(FCLC\) Virtual Connections project](#), which provides children with ASD and their families virtual access to early intervention. This model has consistently demonstrated positive outcomes, and the Ohio Department of Medicaid's planned changes to the tele-health rule may allow for more possibilities like this.
- In order to raise awareness of and address the unique needs of people with autism and the disparity in outcomes across systems, OCALI's Office of Policy developed [Facts & Figures](#) specific to autism. These are provided to the IWGA monthly and shared with members of the administration, legislators, OCALI's advisory board, and other stakeholders.

- IWGA members heard from representatives of the Ohio Disability and Health Program on the [Core Competencies on Disability for Health Care Education](#).

#### DEVELOP SKILLS TO SUCCEED

Life skills develop and change as an individual grows. Skill development is a continuous need throughout an individual's life.

- The IWGA agencies had the opportunity to hear about and provide feedback on Ohio Department of Education's Strategic Plan, [Each Child Our Future](#), which includes a focus on social emotional learning. As Ohio's autism clearinghouse, OCALI serves on the Steering Committee and workgroups developing [Ohio's Plan to Improve Learning Experiences and Outcomes for Students with Disabilities](#).
- The Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, the IWGA's lead agency, and OCALI are working on a variety of virtual reality and virtual coaching pilots to improve outcomes for people with autism and their families.

#### STRENGTHEN SUPPORT ALONG THE WAY

Family is the most important, consistent and instrumental influence in a child's life. A strong base of support is important.

- The IWGA members completed an inventory of projects and initiatives that touched or included families, and whether or not those models were specific to or could be expanded to include autism. This work is on-going.
- [ASD Strategies in Action](#) was developed and deployed in conjunction with the IWGA in 2015. To date, nearly 45,000 people have accessed this resource. Additional coursework was added this year in an effort to respond to the need for more registered behavior technicians (RBT).



- In order to elevate autism in policy discussions, OCALI launched an Office of Policy, which educates and informs policy makers and thought leaders on the issues related to disability, including autism. In addition to Facts & Figures referenced above, other educational materials shared with decision makers can be accessed on the [Office of Policy's website](#).

## HELP OTHERS UNDERSTAND

It is imperative that professionals and community members recognize and understand the characteristics of ASD in order to serve, support, and empower individuals and their families.

- In 2018, a [community toolkit](#) was developed to more broadly share ASD Strategies in Action with local groups such as Autism Societies, libraries, movie theaters and others who have expressed interest in this resource. The toolkit provides everything from marketing materials, video clips, and partnership ideas to share ASD Strategies in Action with communities.
- On behalf of IWGA member-agency Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD), OCALI brought together a wide-array of stakeholders to discuss and develop key components of training for peace officer's relative to [Ohio's Communication Disability Law](#).

## LIVE WELL

Knowing how to network and navigate available community resources is fundamental to developing and sustaining effective supports for a successful future.

- The IWGA and [Employment First Taskforce](#) (EFTF) began hosting joint meetings two times per year (April and October). These meetings have provided opportunities to share data, discuss disparities in outcomes for people with disabilities, and better align efforts. What began as a bi-annual meeting, has turned into monthly collaboration.
- Transition has been the primary topic of joint meetings of IWGA and EFTF. The IWGA had the opportunity to review and provide feedback on [Ohio's Transition Vision Workplan](#), currently in development.

## SUSTAIN THE FUTURE

Thoughtful planning and coordination is necessary to uphold broad, but connected, service systems that are responsive to individuals with ASD and their families.

- The IWGA reviews ASD Strategies in Action data monthly, and continues to see a steady increase in utilization of this resource.

- Given recent coding changes and the Ohio Department of Medicaid’s proposed autism benefit, the IWGA is optimistic about data possibilities going forward. The IWGA has collected individual agency data, given feedback to member agencies relative to their data, and highlighted the work of those agencies who have developed data-sharing agreements, and can track individuals across systems to learn about services, spending, and outcomes (i.e., OOD and DODD).
- IWGA member agencies completed an inventory to identify the initiatives and projects which include (or exclude) autism, many of which have a social emotional focus.
- In addition to the transition work noted above, the IWGA, through OCALI, is actively involved in Ohio’s efforts to improve transition from “Part C” (early intervention) to “Part B” (preschool), providing professional development, tools, and resources to professionals at all levels, across systems.

At the July meeting of the IWGA, members reviewed accomplishments and activities from SFY2019, the results of the family survey, agency priorities and budget initiatives, identifying the following key bodies of work for FY2019:

- Autism in adulthood. While the IWGA has focused on “transition” as it applies to early intervention/preschool, and high school/employment, it has not historically focused on other areas of adult “transition” such as healthcare, housing, and long-term planning for families. Other departments will be invited to attend as necessary. These will be priorities for 2019.
- Multisystem youth (MSY) with autism. MSY is a focus of IWGA member-agencies, a priority for the administration, and a budget initiative. We hear repeatedly from families and providers about the need to address youth who have mental/behavioral health needs and intellectual/developmental disabilities –including autism. Family and Children First will also be joining the IWGA.



In addition, the IWGA will be monitoring and considering issues related to funding, as the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) seeks input in redesigning behavioral health services to include an autism benefit, and rebids managed care contracts. Technology continues to be a focus as DODD advances their Technology First efforts, ODM expands tele-health, and technology pilots roll-out across the state.

Foundational to this work is the voice of individuals and families. The IWGA seeks input and utilizes [OCALI's advisory board](#) as the primary means for parents, individuals, advocacy groups, and other stakeholders to contribute to the state's policy development and implementation.



*I feel blessed in life that even though I am challenged by autism, I can still bring forth change. I wrote in my book, 'Go to those with autism that you love and embrace them in a new way; one that shows you are not there to change them into the humans you desire them to be, but the humans they were meant to be. Assist them in the way to allow them a chance to be successful in their life dreams and desires.' I do feel Ohio is working hard to bring this quote to a reality. We are blessed to have so much unity and so many hardworking individuals that strive to make my life and many others living with autism a valued life, a safe life, a life worth living.*

**Sondra Williams**

Advocate, Author, OCALI Advisory Board Member  
Quality Lives