

NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services

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Federal government approves ND request to cover autism services for young children

BISMARCK, N.D. – The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) notified the North Dakota Department of Human Services that it has approved a waiver so the state can cover new services for young children ages birth to their fifth birthday who have autism spectrum disorders.

JoAnne Hoesel, the Department's Cabinet Lead for Program and Policy, said the waiver will give families access to an evaluation team that can validate their child's diagnosis and serve as a resource for the family's local service providers. Qualifying families will also receive training, help coordinating services, and access to in-home support staff to help provide structured activities focusing on communication, behavior, and other individual needs. The waiver will also provide financial help with the cost of equipment, supplies, and environmental modifications.

"Our goal is to provide training and support to parents so they can promote their child's development and care for their children at home. We want to keep families together and prevent out-of-home placements," Hoesel said.

The new Medicaid waiver services will be able to serve up to 30 young children during a 12-month period. Children qualify based on diagnosis and the child's income. Families apply by contacting the Developmental Disabilities Unit at one of the department's eight regional human services centers, which are located in Bismarck, Devils Lake, Dickinson, Fargo, Grand Forks, Jamestown, Minot, and Williston. Contact information is online at www.nd.gov/dhs/locations/regionalhsc/.

Informational Meetings

Regional informational meetings are being planned. The first meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, Nov. 23, 2010, 7 – 8 p.m. in Bismarck in the Prairie Rose Room of the department's Prairie Hills Plaza location, 1237 W. Divide Ave., Bismarck, which also houses West Central Human Services Center. The entrance is on the north side of the building.

The Centers for Disease Control estimates that about 1 in 110 children in the United States have an autism spectrum disorder. It is more common in boys. While there is no cure, early diagnosis and intervention services appear to improve child development and to strengthen relationships between parents and children.

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Hoesel said the waiver builds on existing services available to North Dakota children and their families. Medicaid covers medical, therapy, and related needs for qualifying children, and the state's Infant Development Program already works with families of infants and toddlers with developmental delays.

The waiver will pay for additional beneficial services and will enable North Dakota to do a better job of serving young children with autism spectrum disorders, Hoesel said.

Participating families will be able to direct their children's services and choose their own support staff, and will work with a fiscal agent to manage their approved service budget.

Department staff consulted with Minot State University's Center for Persons with Disabilities to draft the waiver.

Federal law authorizes the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to waive certain Medicaid requirements. These waivers enable states to cover an array of home and community-based services (HCBS) for targeted groups of people and provide an alternative to institutional care. Waivers typically include services not covered through a Medicaid State Plan such as respite care, environmental modifications, or family training, and enhance the state's coverage.

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