

## **City of Austin Health Plan:**

### ***Adding a Meaningful Autism Benefit for Individuals on the Autism Spectrum***

#### **Who We Are & What We're Requesting**

We are Jacquie Benestante & Lisa Whitted, wives of city employees, mothers of children diagnosed with autism, advocating for families who work for the city. We are asking that the most effective and evidence based autism therapy, *Applied Behavioral Analysis*, (ABA), be included in the City Of Austin Health Benefit Plan beginning in 2016.

#### **What is autism?**

Autism spectrum disorder is a range of complex neurodevelopment disorders that can cause significant impairment in social, occupational and other areas of functioning.

#### **What Is Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)?**

- ABA is a behavioral intervention proven effective in addressing the core symptoms of autism as well as developing skills and improving and enhancing functioning in numerous areas that affect the health & well being of people with autism.
- Children who receive early intensive behavioral treatment have been known to show substantial gains in cognition, language, academic performance, and adaptive behavior as well as some measures of social behavior, and their outcomes have been significantly better than those of children in control groups who did not receive ABA therapy.

#### **Organizations that have proven & endorse ABA as an effective treatment for autism**

- American Academy of Pediatricians
- National Institute of Mental Health
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention
- US Surgeon General
- American Psychological Association
- Centers for Medicare and Medicaid

#### **What is the cost of adding ABA to the City of Austin Health Benefit Plan?**

- Data from 3 states that voluntarily added ABA (South Carolina, Louisiana, & Arizona), shows the actual cost of providing an ABA benefit was anywhere from **293% less to 1,261% less than projected costs.**
- Autism Speaks found that the average cost to provide ABA benefits was 46 cents per month per member (pmpm) using 3 year cost data from 6 states that voluntarily provide ABA benefits.
- In September 2014 there were 17 children (between 1-9 years) identified with autism in the COA health plan.

#### **How Do We Compare Nationally?**

- Nationally, 36% of large employers provide ABA coverage as a benefit.
- 40% of companies with 10,000-19,999 employees provide ABA coverage.
- 35% of government employee plans cover ABA.

### **SB 1484: TX State Law Mandating ABA Coverage For State-Regulated Health Plans**

SB 1484, which took effect in September 2013, eliminates the age 9 cap, but limits annual ABA benefits to \$36,000 a year for children aged 10 and above. Under current law, state-regulated health plans are required to cover the diagnosis and treatment of autism, including behavioral health treatment, such as Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), as well as speech, occupational and physical therapy. To qualify for the extended coverage, children must be diagnosed with autism by the age of 10 to gain the coverage.

**Self-funded plans, such as the City of Austin Health Benefit Plan**, are exempt from state law, and instead, are governed by ERISA (federal law). Therefore, self-funded plans may choose whether or not they wish to provide ABA benefits for employees.

### **Which Health Plans Opt To Cover ABA Locally?**

- Austin Independent School District
- Travis County

### **Which Health Plans Opt To Cover ABA Nationally?**

- Yahoo
- Rubbermaid
- Home Depot
- Capital One
- Intel
- Merck
- MIT
- Ohio State University

List of additional National companies covering ABA can be emailed upon request.

### **Contact:**

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Facebook: COA FOR ABA (Citizens of Austin For Applied Behavior Analysis)

Links on ABA effectiveness studies & cost data can be emailed upon request.

Data provided by Autism Speaks. [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org)