



## **AUSTIN MAYOR'S COMMITTEE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES RECOMMENDATION 20150209-03A**

Date: February 09, 2015

Subject: Support for Autism Treatment Coverage in City Group Health Insurance Plan

Motioned By: Commissioner Ron Lucey

Seconded By: Commissioner Kathy Keller

### **Recommendation**

The committee unanimously approved a motion to provide support from the committee to include ABA (applied behavioral analysis) treatment coverage to 17 children with Autism in the City Health Insurance Plan. ABA is an effective early intervention treatment for younger children with Autism. There would be a minimal fiscal impact to individual employee's health premiums for providing Autism health insurance coverage to affected dependents of City employees (currently 17 children).

### **Description of Recommendation to Council**

Early diagnosis and treatment are critical to a positive outcome for individuals with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

- Behavioral health treatment in the form of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) includes: Speech, Occupational and Physical Therapy, coupled with psychological, psychiatric, and pharmaceutical care.
- Studies have shown that ABA can significantly help children with Autism achieve normal IQs. Despite positive studies, insurers still frequently deny ABA treatment pointing out that they are considered experimental in nature.
- The actual cost to premiums from insurers that cover ABA averages .46 cents in premium increase by the third year of plan coverage for ABA by the surveyed providers.
- The City of Austin Health Insurance Plan is "Self-Funded" where the employer pays the health benefits for its employees from its own pocket and assume all the risk and hires a third party administrator to manage claims. Self-funded plans are exempt from the Federal ERISA from most state insurance regulation, including benefits reform.
- For additional information please contact Judith Ursitti at:  
[Judith.ursitti@autismspeaks.org](mailto:Judith.ursitti@autismspeaks.org)
- A complete copy of the Autism Speaks presentation from Executive Director Judith Ursitti is available by email from Lee Nguyen at [lee.nguyen@austintexas.gov](mailto:lee.nguyen@austintexas.gov).

### **Rationale:**

The City has a demonstrated commitment to support for Austin citizens with disabilities. This support extends to equal access to health care coverage for employees and their dependents with disabilities. Behavioral health issues may have a similar or greater long-term impact on the functioning of an individual with a disability as compared to health conditions that receive traditional healthcare coverage. Early intervention is critical to make a permanent and lasting positive change in behavioral, social, and cognitive outcomes of children with Autism, potentially saving significant costs to the City in these children's later years.

**Vote**

For: 7

Against: Zero

Abstain: Zero

Absent: None

Attest: Dolores Gonzalez, Mayor' Committee for People with Disabilities, City Liaison

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