



May 19, 2008

Dr. Robert Gates
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Gates:

On behalf of thousands of military parents who have children with autism spectrum disorders; we write asking the Department of Defense (DoD) to work in a leadership capacity supporting and reimbursing for the numerous therapies applicable to the treatment of autism spectrum disorders.

The Autism Collaboration is comprised of the longest standing autism organizations devoted to research, support, advocacy and treatment for children with autism and their families. The Autism Collaboration, and additional undersigned organizations knows that when TRICARE policies are further reviewed and revised, these further revisions based on our recommendations (below), and that of many others which you've already received will have the potential to effectively help thousands of families and children with autism in the short term. In the long term, further revision of TRICARE policies, and the DoD Enhanced Access to Autism Services Demonstration will serve as a model for other insurers and health plans to emulate.

While the Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports that the number of children with autism is currently 1 in 150; the Department of Education statistics show that 1 in 67 children are impacted by autism. The American Academy of Pediatrics has recently issued a policy of early diagnosis and early intervention. Early diagnosis does absolutely no good if children with autism are not able to receive early treatment. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure and that old adage applies to treating children with autism as well. It is estimated that over the course of a life time it will cost anywhere from 3.2 million to 5 million dollars to care for a person with autism. It is currently estimated that there are between 250,000 and 500,000 children with autism in the United States, and the number of children diagnosed with autism continues to grow every year. And America thinks the war in Iraq was expensive! If left unchecked, the autism epidemic will prove far more costly, and will do so for several generations to come.

Autism is treatable and children with autism are actually recovering, but when treatment is delayed the effectiveness of treatment is significantly diminished; thus the increased and real possibility that

a child with autism will need life long care. It is time for DoD to work in a leadership role which will benefit children with autism, families, and the long term financial health of our country.

With over 75 years of experience in successfully providing answers that make a difference in treatment options for autism, the undersigned organizations bring to your attention the following recommendations. It is when these recommendations are acted upon and implemented; DoD and TRICARE will be demonstrating leadership in the treatment of children with autism.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

DoD revise the Code of Federal Regulations to recognize the medical necessity of treatment for autism spectrum disorders. Treatment for autism spectrum disorders is medically necessary to treat a neurological disorder and necessary to prevent future physical and mental injury to the patient.

Treatment for autism spectrum disorders should include the following care prescribed, provided, or ordered for an individual diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder by a licensed physician or a licensed psychologist who determines the care to be medically necessary: Habilitative or rehabilitative care, pharmacy care, psychiatric care, psychological care, speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and any care for individuals with autism spectrum disorder that is determined to be medically necessary by the beneficiary's physician.

Habilitative and rehabilitative care should include professional counseling and guidance services and treatment programs, including Applied Behavior Analysis and related structured behavior programs that are necessary to develop, improve, maintain, and restore to the maximum extent practicable, the functioning of the individual with autism spectrum disorders. Applied Behavior Analysis and related structure behavior programs are not special education and this categorization requires correction.

DoD, TRICARE, and ECHO policies need to include specific language pertaining to the exact diagnosis, and include all categories of autism spectrum disorder under the umbrella of Pervasive Developmental Disorders in the DSM-IV.

When a child is diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder, eligibility and enrollment of the child into ECHO needs to be physician directed, automatic, and seamless. The enrollment process as it is now, serves to second guess and scrutinize physician recommendations and the treatment needs of children with autism.

Eliminate the arbitrary monthly cap of \$2500.00 of covered treatment. The Demonstration has reduced the rate of payment to providers in order to maintain this cap. This reduction in rate to maintain the cap provides little incentive for highly educated professionals providing therapies to become TRICARE providers. This is not to the benefit of children or families. There is no other health condition a child may have that has a monthly cap on the dollar amount of services a child can receive.

Eliminate the requirement of a clinical review of each child's diagnosis and treatment plan. The child's treatment plan should be directed by his or her physician and the provider of specific services rendered, not TRICARE. Submission of an IEP/IFSP is not necessary if treatment is physician and provider directed, thus reducing paperwork and ECHO program overhead.

Eliminate the requirement of children under the age of six to undergo IQ testing. There is no other disability in which any insurance or health plan requires a child to score a minimum of 35 on an IQ test before medically necessary services will be provided and covered. Furthermore, as ECHO currently covers IBI as a “special education” service; it would be a violation of federal law for public educational services to be denied to a child with autism who might score below 35 on an IQ test. This requirement is very concerning as it appears discriminatory, and would be considered such in California as it is against the law to require IQ testing for African American children.

Given that the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children begin intensive intervention as soon as the child is diagnosed; there should be no age requirement for enrollment. Enrollment should happen immediately upon diagnosis.

The current ECHO respite benefit is unavailable to most families due to the current policy restricting access to this vital service as well as the current \$2,500 financial cap. It is unethical to force parents to choose between treatment for their child and respite care. Respite care is vital to the physical and mental well being of those parenting a child (ren) with autism.

The undersigned organizations are aware that, the current ECHO program has and the Demonstration project will continue, to interfere with combat readiness and military retention. The DoD has a moral and ethical obligation to the United States of America to provide the treatment and care that military dependent children with autism desperately need. The Department of Defense needs to set the standard for treatment and care of children with autism, and in doing so continue to protect this great country of ours.

We thank the Department of Defense for the serious consideration and action you will take based on our recommendations.

Very Respectfully,

Autism One
Autism Research Institute
Autism Society of America
Generation Rescue
National Autism Association
National Vaccine Information Center
Safeminds

Talk About Curing Autism
Unlocking Autism
Vaccine Autoimmune Project
Vital Interventions Accessible
Global Maternal Child Health Association
Waterbirth International

Signature page attached

CC Copy to:

Dr. S. Ward Casscells, Assistant Secretary of Defense
Dr. (Major General) Elder Granger, Deputy Director – TriCare Management Activity



Ed Arranga
Autism One – Founder



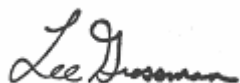
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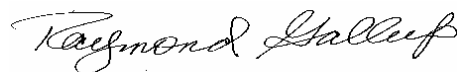
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