

2023-2024 Public Policy Targets

The Autism Society of North Carolina (ASNC) creates public policy targets every two years based on feedback from our public policy survey; our work with families, individuals and professionals, coalition partners and policymakers; and our staff and Board of Directors. The needs are many: unmet needs waiting lists have grown to more than 16,000 people, many services and supports have shrunk, and crisis services cannot meet demands. Disparities remain in local funding for special education. Unemployment for those with autism remains between 50-80%. Our targets are framed by the challenges of the last decade: prior to the current global pandemic, economic recovery had not resulted in investments in services and supports. As we again face uncertain economic times, ASNC's goals remain:

- **To protect and defend the services and supports currently in place for people with autism and other developmental disabilities**
- **To empower people to advocate for themselves**
- **To advocate for investments in people: in their futures, in their inclusion, and in services and supports that promote people's abilities to contribute to their families, to their communities and to society**

ASNC has identified dozens of policy issues deeply affecting the lives of those on the spectrum and their families, and survey participants noted many more. ***With limited resources with which to advocate, ASNC must select focus areas as we advocate:***

1: People with autism live in and contribute to their communities

- *Make meaningful progress in increasing investments in services to reduce or eliminate the 16,000 person waiting list and eliminate disparities between wait times in different counties.*
- *Ensure people with disabilities have staffing for services by paying direct support staff a sustainable wage, supporting the DSP career path, and increasing provider rates support these outcomes.*
- *North Carolina develops sustainable, supportive housing options for people on the autism spectrum.*

2: People with autism have opportunities for growth and are not left behind their peers

- *Assure access to diagnostic assessments by increasing rates and directly funding low or no cost programs.*
- *Increase special education funding and remove funding disparities, including caps on local special education funds, to better support students in schools, expand teacher training/mentoring, and provide access to the same learning resources.*
- *Make sure adults on the spectrum do not "fall off a services cliff" after leaving high school: youth transition to employment opportunities, secondary education programs, and meaningful activities; adults have access to an array of services that work for them and their families.*
- *Close health care coverage gaps and assure access to affordable health care coverage.*

3: People with autism are treated justly

- *End the use of seclusion and restraint in schools by implementing evidence-based alternatives.*
- *Modernize training on autism for law enforcement and require training for detention officers and other sheriffs' personnel.*
- *Ensure NC's guardianship program has stable funding, training for courts and families, and focuses on retention and/or restoration of rights when possible.*