PRESIDENT / CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER’S MESSAGE

Why a Strategic Plan?

- CDC incidence rate of 1 out of 68 children now have an autism diagnosis
- Over 50,000 high school students with an autism diagnosis transitioning each year into adulthood
- Over 70% of adults with autism are unemployed or highly under-employed
- A growing gap among racial and low-income groups who can’t get access to needed services
- Waiting lists for services in some states exceeding five years
- Rapidly changing role of government funding and support
- So much More!

In 2015, the Autism Society of America embarked on a comprehensive, highly inclusive and transparent strategic planning process that examined how best to assure that each person with an autism diagnosis would be able to maximize his or her quality of life each and every day. Our goal was simply to define how best to advance the work of a national network of the Autism Society to utilize our volunteers and staff members to assure of opportunity and measurable outcome success in life for each of the over 3,000,000 individuals related to their quality of life.

ASA’s 5 year strategy identifies five distinct strategic goals critical to our mission success:

- Lifespan Programs & Services
- Effective Advocacy & Public Policy
- Expanded Education & Training
- Integrated Information & Referral
- Enabling Effective Operations

In addition, the strategic plan also details a number of cross-cutting factors to enable ASA’s long-term success. To ensure that our intent becomes reality, ASA implemented a comprehensive strategic management approach. We established numerous cross-functional teams with our Affiliate, public, and industry partners; and engaged over 200 key stakeholders (including family members, professionals, affiliate leaders and especially individuals with an autism diagnosis) throughout the process. The results are a robust 5 year Strategic Plan supported by detailed implementation plans. Collectively, these drive our budget priorities to ensure our goals and objectives are translated into discrete actions, initiatives, and innovations for which the organization will be held accountable.

The results of this year long process is described in detail throughout this document. It represents the work we have done for 50 years of caring and helping a person in their community. It represents people coming together to help others. It represents the Autism Society. To all involved, thank you.

Scott M. Badesch
President / CEO
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the last half century the prevalence of autism has grown exponentially. Fifty years ago when the Autism Society of America (ASA) was formed, the autism incident rates exceeded 1 in 5,000. Today, studies report 1 in 68 children is affected by autism. ASA is committed to improving the lives all individuals and their families affected by autism. ASA serves the communities throughout the nation supporting those affected by autism such as individuals, families, caregivers, educators, medical professionals, service providers, first responders, employers, social agencies, and legislators entrusted with advancing protections. Meeting this commitment requires a comprehensive strategic approach spanning the ASA network and ecosystem in which our individuals, their families, and partners live.

1. **Lifespan Programs & Services** – Advancing an individual’s and their family’s quality of life in measurable terms at each stage of life with targeted services and programs requires a holistic approach to lifespan planning. At each stage in a person’s life and development, key transitions must be proactively planned for and enabled with robust programs and services expansive enough to account for the wide variety of spectrum conditions encountered. Programs must be holistic in orientation (whole-person), sensitive to cultural differences, and geared towards practical application in a family-centered environment.

2. **Effective Advocacy & Public Policy** – Effectively advocating at local, state, and national levels to improve services and strengthen protections, is critical to enabling individuals living with autism to improve their quality of life. This requires unifying the voice of the Autism community and integrating legislation priorities across federal, state, and local municipalities in a coordinated manner. A concerted focus is required to ensure post legislative enactment – such as regulation and programmatic implementations – meet the intent and spirit of legislative framers.

3. **Expanded Education & Training** – Providing and ensuring high quality, comprehensive training and educational opportunities on critical autism-related topics are available for professionals, employers, families and individuals. This requires physical, electronic, and on-line content to equip stakeholders with real-world useful application techniques and methods, translate best practices into practical practice, and enable “de-stigmatizing the system” to effectively navigate and advocate for individuals with ASD within education, institutional, and government systems.

4. **Integrated Information & Referral** – Providing outreach, information, and referral connecting those in need with the best local, state, and national resources regardless of program affiliation or source. Infrastructure enhancements, expanded call center information services, and integration of multiple content delivery and dissemination channels will improve accessibility, navigability, and content relevance for users. Leverage of best practices across the entire network from state and local Affiliates, local and national partners, professional and educational institutions, will enhance ASA’s ability to get resources to families in need in a timely manner.

5. **Enabling Effective Operations** – Increasing organizational capacity, financial resources, Affiliate capacity, human capital skills and expertise, improving operational efficiency and effectiveness are all required to deliver strategic outcomes. Operating effectively within the disability ecosystem requires improving governance and organizational alignment at national, state, and locals levels (points of service interactions). This requires ASA to integrate its product and services lines, improve its technology infrastructure, and raise the professional skills and expertise of everyone within the organization – across Board members, Affiliate Directors, staff, grass roots volunteers, and partners.
BACKGROUND

For over 50 years the Autism Society has been the nation’s leading grass roots organization. Our Mission has been steadfast and unwavering. We are singularly focused on a single purpose which defines not only who we are, but also provides a critical litmus test for our strategic decision-making.

Over the years, our Vision evolved as our ability to expand our impact and further outcomes has grown. Yet throughout, we have never lost sight of who we are and why we are here. At our core, we are a grass roots organization dedicated to maximizing quality of life for all affected by autism. Our vision has grown from a focus on children to encompass all individuals on the spectrum at every age in their lifespan – from cradle to grave.

Our Guiding Principles are the foundation of our beliefs, shared values, and guide how we conduct ourselves in pursuing our mission. The Autism Society and its Affiliates are committed to the following:

**ASA’s Mission**
*Improving the lives of all affected by Autism*

**ASA’s Vision**
*The Autism Society envisions individuals and families living with autism are able to maximize their quality of life, are treated with the highest level of dignity, and live in a society in which their talents and skills are appreciated and valued*

**ASA’s Guiding Principles**

- We provide services without regard to a person’s age, race, religion, sexual orientation, income level, gender and other disabilities or level of need on the autism spectrum.
- We provide families, professionals and individuals living with autism with opportunities to participate in our governance, on our committees, and as staff members.
- We partner with others to advance the well-being of all living with autism.
- We promote individual choice and self-determination of individuals living with autism, aided by parental and guardian advocacy, when such advocacy is appropriate.
- We recognize a person living with autism can and should be able to maximize their quality of life and oppose any denial of their opportunities.
- We oppose any discrimination and harm directed towards individuals living with autism and their families.
- We are transparent, responsible and accountable to those we serve, those who support us, and the general community in our stewardship of funds.
- We assure the confidentiality of our services – and adhere to required confidentiality laws, and regulations pertaining to such services.
- We strive to ensure our programs, services, and decisions are outcome-driven.
- We maintain independence from political partisanship and commercial interests.
- We respect the work of our affiliates and do not engage in actions that enhance one organization at the expense of others.
- We support data and evidence-based analyses of options informed by broad knowledge of educational, research, clinical, government, business and program services experience.
- We support an options policy and provide information on options so individuals can exercise freedom of choice in their decision-making.
STRATEGY

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complex developmental disability. Signs typically appear during early childhood and affect a person’s ability to communicate and interact with others. ASD is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is a “spectrum condition” affecting individuals differently and to varying degrees. There is no known single cause of autism, but increased awareness and early diagnosis/intervention and access to appropriate services/supports lead to significantly improved outcomes.

With advancement of improved outcomes also comes the reality that individuals and their families are now living longer with this condition. As children mature and develop into adults there are a wide variety of needs that must be met across their entire lifespan. ASA stands ready to meet that challenge.

Understanding today’s environment, identifying and addressing the strengths, weakness, resources, constraints, capabilities, and drivers are paramount. Increases in knowledge on how to support those with disabilities, changing societal attitudes, and a culture more embracing of those with disabilities are leading to greater recognition that regardless of impairment persons with a disability have meaningful contribution to make in society, and lives worth living fully.

To ensure that our intent becomes reality, ASA implemented a comprehensive strategic management approach. We established numerous cross-functional teams with our Affiliate, public, and industry partners; and engaged over 200 key stakeholders throughout the process. The results are a detailed implementation plan which drives our budget priorities to ensure our goals and objectives are translated into discrete actions, initiatives, and innovations for which the organization will be held accountable.

ASA’s Strategic Plan is designed to answer several critical questions:

- What are the right things to do to achieve our mission and vision?
- How do we know we are doing the right things?
- Are we making decisions and investments that deliver our mission and vision?
- Are we aligning our resources to deliver the strategy?
- Are we achieving intended outcomes?

ASA’s Strategic Plan guides detailed implementation planning. Building upon current initiatives, implementation planning leverages best practices from private sector, public service agencies, and academia. ASA will make use of innovative strategies widely adopted as best practices across disability communities. Furthermore, our plan incorporates lessons learned from past experience. From a content perspective, ASA’s implementation plan will initiate policy and structural changes, create new initiatives, and accelerate existing work with the overarching objective of accelerating mission attainment. Our plan specifies required capabilities, actions, milestones, and associated resource requirements. The implementation plan also includes steps and actions necessary to:

- Set clear direction through a structured framework (strategic roadmap)
- Clearly define success in terms of measurable outcomes mapped to specific initiatives that fulfill them; and
- Sequence key initiatives ready for action when funding, resources, and capacity are allocated.

Collectively, all implementation plan elements will enable ASA’s Board and President/CEO to hold the organization accountable to achieving targeted outcomes. Below are the strategy goals, objectives, outcomes, and strategy initiatives that will be undertaken:
Goal 1: Lifespan Programs & Services – Advancing an individual’s and their family’s quality of life in measurable terms at each stage of life with targeted services and programs requires a holistic approach to lifespan planning. At each stage in a person’s life and development, key transitions must be proactively planned for and enabled with robust programs and services expansive enough to account for the wide variety of spectrum conditions encountered. Programs must be holistic in orientation (whole-person), sensitive to cultural differences, and geared towards practical application in a family-centered environment.

Key Objectives – what is success?

- Early Screening, Diagnosis and Intervention
- Opportunities in Education
- Family & Community Support
- Quality of Life & Success in Adulthood
- Meaningful Employment
- Independence and Self-determination

Key Outcomes – what results do we expect?

- Decreased average age of initial diagnosis and increased accessibility to early intervention
- Increased percentage of students with ASD provided with appropriate therapies, services, and educational aids needed for meaningful progress toward individual goals and successfully transitioned into inclusive education environments commensurate with their abilities
- Increased availability of support for families in preparation of and throughout key life transitions
- Increased percentage of individuals living in least restrictive environment in community settings
- Increased rates of employment for individuals with ASD in settings with maximally appropriate levels of inclusion; Decreased rates of under-employment for individuals with ASD
- Increased percentage of individuals with ASD report a greater ability to exercise self-determination in life decisions
- An effective network of relationships (inter-personal friendships, professional, family, work, community, religious, etc.) enabling the highest degree of independence and self-determination

Key Initiatives – what we will do to attain them?

- Affiliated Tiered Services – service models and standards for program services and operations
- Local & Partner Best Practices – identify and disseminate across the affiliate network
- Enabling Employment – create local business advisory groups to improve employment access
- Adult Post-Secondary Education Transition – best practices guides to support students with ASD
- Residential Progression – program to facilitate movement towards a less restrictive setting
- New to Autism – orientation for recently diagnosed individuals, parents, and caregivers
- Diagnostic Barriers Assessment – identify impediments to initial diagnosis and screening
- Education Excellence – partnership with school district to promulgate exemplary programs
- National Family Survey – nationwide survey on adults on the spectrum and their families
- Facilitated Coaching Guides – leverage WV Autism Training Center partnership model
Goal 2: Effective Advocacy & Public Policy – Effectively advocating at local, state, and national levels to improve services and strengthen protections, is critical to enabling individuals living with autism to improve their quality of life. This requires unifying the voice of the Autism community and integrating legislation priorities across federal, state, and local municipalities in a coordinated manner. A concerted focus is required to ensure post legislative enactment – such as regulation and programmatic implementations – meet the intent and spirit of legislative framers.

Key Objectives – what is success?

- A unified, Society-wide voice for specific legislation, bills and issues
- Increased coordination and integration of state-level and national legislation providing more consistent access and service delivery across the nation
- The Society has influence with peer organizations over national agendas
- State and local affiliates can access support services required to affect change in their local/state context

Key Outcomes – what results do we expect?

- Defined national agenda where local, state, and national resources are fully integrated
- Individuals with ASD and other Autism Society stakeholders hold positions on critical decision making bodies at all levels of public policy-making
- The entire network has access to information on what is occurring at state and local jurisdictions on specific state/local-level legislation
- Basic state-level legislation addressing education, services, insurance, and legal protections is established in all 50 states and U.S. territories
- Increased integration and partnerships with other disability groups and coalitions to leverage broader influence within local and state communities
- The Society has membership in critical national policy-making bodies
- Best practices from individual affiliates are leveraged across the entire affiliate network to support efforts in other states/jurisdictions
- The infrastructure required to effectively mobilize local resources for leverage at local, state, and national levels is established (e.g., coalition building, grass roots networks, training, resources, expertise, funding)

Key Initiatives – what we will do to attain them?

- Policy Priorities – Top 5 nationwide priorities are pursued in a fully integrated manner
- Local & Partner Best Practices – identify and disseminate across the affiliate network
- Legislative Tools – create a single tool suite to facilitate Affiliate collaboration and integration
- Affiliate Policy Leadership – elevate Affiliate thought leaders to positions of national prominence
- Disability Partnering – broad national and state-based collaboration with disability organizations
- Dedicated Advocacy Team – dedicated team championing legislative priorities in ASA’s network
Goal 3: Expanded Education & Training – Providing and ensuring high quality, comprehensive training and educational opportunities on critical autism-related topics are available for professionals, employers, families and individuals. This requires physical, electronic, and on-line content to equip stakeholders with real-world useful application techniques and methods, translate best practices into practical practice, and enable “de-stigmatizing the system” to effectively navigate and advocate for individuals with ASD within education, institutional, and government systems.

Key Objectives – what is success?

- Dissemination of information and topics not currently supported within the broader ecosystem
- Effective partnering with local and national community stakeholders
- Rich and robust clearinghouse / body of knowledge repository capabilities for the community, families, affiliates, educators, and other professionals
- Increased number of individuals, families and family members understand how to translate concepts into real-life applications integrated across home, school, work, and community
- Underserved populations are served in a culturally appropriate manner

Key Outcomes – what results do we expect?

- Comprehensive programs and modules targeted to fill gaps in current information availability
- Information materials are leveraged through partnerships with organizations best positioned with established distribution and dissemination mechanisms
- Local resources effectively supplemented with nationally supported tools and materials
- Content provided is relevant, concrete, with practical application in the real world
- Family-centered information is integrated with whole family contexts. Adaptions are geared to each family individual as well as holistically integrated across the family environment
- Programs address cultural competence, differences, faith-base, and simple language translation

Key Initiatives – what we will do to attain them?

- Person-centered Lifespan Planning – facilitating individual decision-making and transitions
- Parent Education/Empowerment – equip caregivers with actionable real-world best practices
- Affiliate Training – training to build local capacity, improve service delivery and knowledge-share
- Information Partnerships – national & community-based relationships to extend Affiliate reach
- Education Information System – overhaul data/content management and dissemination system
- Department of Defense Partnership – DoD grant partnerships for military families with Autism
- Online Curricula – partner with educational research institutions to augment new content
Goal 4: Integrated Information & Referral – Providing outreach, information, and referral connecting those in need with the best local, state, and national resources regardless of program affiliation or source. Infrastructure enhancements, expanded call center information services, and integration of multiple content delivery and dissemination channels will improve accessibility, navigability, and content relevance for users. Leverage of best practices across the entire network from state and local Affiliates, local and national partners, professional and educational institutions, will enhance ASA’s ability to get resources to families in need in a timely manner.

Key Objectives – what is success?

- Increased number of individuals seek assistance thru the Autism Society, its local Affiliates, and serve as a conduit to other relevant sources
- Autism Society is recognized as “first call, go-to” resource and a trusted guide across the lifespan
- Delivery of actionable and timely high quality information as reflected in satisfaction surveys
- Local Affiliates provide information and referral as a “core” service

Key Outcomes – what results do we expect?

- Increased number of individuals use information and referral to access and connect with services within their local community, at the state-level, and at the national-level
- Increased number of individuals in under-served communities use information and referral to access and connect with services within their local community and cultural context
- I&R is available in all 50 states and U.S. territories
- Increased number of access methods, communication channels, and self-service/self-assist entry points available on a 24 / 7 / 365 basis
- Service and support to anyone/anywhere – Timely assessment and routing of information and referral inquiries to the best local provider across the entire network regardless of point of entry
- Increased local affiliate information and referral response effectiveness
- Increased number of affiliates using common referral data repository(ies)
- Data analytics enabling more effectively targeting outreach and information of interest / need
- All affiliates provide information and referral to a defined standard
- Local and state affiliates are supported by nationally-provided information capabilities, support services, and infrastructure

Key Initiatives – what we will do to attain them?

- Call Center Enhancements – integrated email, live chat, metrics, IQDB, and bi-directional routing
- Expanded Social Media – enhanced social media presence to engage consumers where they are
- Multi-channel Delivery – increased distributions channels for info, news, education, and training
- Affiliated Tiered Services – service models and standards for program services and operations
- I&R Certification – I&R personnel certified to promote high quality, reliable and consistent info
- I&R as a Service – expand provision of I&R Services to other agencies and external parties
Goal 5: Enabling Effective Operations – Increasing organizational capacity, financial resources, Affiliate capacity, human capital skills and expertise, improving operational efficiency and effectiveness are all required to deliver strategic outcomes. Operating effectively within the disability ecosystem requires improving governance and organizational alignment at national, state, and locals levels (points of service interactions). This requires ASA to integrate its product and services lines, improve its technology infrastructure, and raise the professional skills and expertise of everyone within the organization – across Board members, Affiliate Directors, staff, grass roots volunteers, and partners.

Key Objectives – what is success?

- Increase sustained revenue generation
- Increase Affiliate capacity
- Improve operational efficiency and effectiveness required to deliver strategic outcomes
- Increase human capital skills, expertise, and professionalism

Key Outcomes – what results do we expect?

- Increased number of individuals use information and referral to access and connect with services within their local community, at the state-level, and at the national-level
- Financial resources sufficient to deliver and sustain all Mission Area Objectives
- Operational reserves which allow 1 years unfunded operations
- Self-sustaining/self-funded National Board of Directors
- Local Affiliate capacity sufficient to deliver and sustain all local mission objectives
- State Affiliate capacity sufficient to deliver and sustain all state-wide mission objectives
- All Affiliates have paid executive and administrative staff
- Administrative overhead costs reduced while maintaining quality and timeliness goals
- Consistent execution of core services and administrative functions by the entire network
- Organizational adjustments that align unit accountability with appropriate operational span of control and responsibilities
- Paid and volunteer personnel fully trained in assigned missions, programs, and services

Key Initiatives – what we will do to attain them?

- Investment Board – revenue generation entity chartered to develop large scale program funding
- Marketing / Co-Branding – sustainable marketing infrastructure encompassing entire network
- National Conference Future – task force examining opportunity cost and return on investment
- Technology Modernization – technology infrastructure upgrades to enable strategy realization
- Products & Services Revenue – establish recurring set of product/service-based revenue streams
- Unified Membership Structure – unified membership program as part of revenue-sharing
- Affiliate Standards – differentiated to account for local/state operations and program contexts
- Grants & Events Revenue – funding streams from private foundations and governmental entities
- Regional Liaisons – funded positions to assist with intra-region coordination of efforts
- Administrative Outsourcing – improve Affiliate funding effectiveness for community services
PLAN EXECUTION

Implementation of the ASA's Strategic Plan is accomplished by mapping each strategic goal, objective, and implementation strategy to operational initiatives to ensure organizational accountability and traceability. Implementation strategies will deliver capabilities and support operations critical to achieving the higher level goals, objectives, and outcomes.

Each implementation plan will have an executive Board chair to lead the effort while other leaders contribute with additional implementation plans that reflect their contribution to success. These implementation plans are prioritized and sequenced across multiple horizons to effectively balance the following factors:

- Impact and importance
- Organizational capacity
- Logical interdependencies that drive precedence
- Incremental staging to deliver early benefit realization while progressively moving towards full impact realization over a longer time horizon.

The figure below depicts the sequencing approach approved by the Board of Directors in July 2015. It depicts “waves” of strategic initiatives. Successive waves will be launched only once certain conditions have been met – completion of predecessor initiatives (or sufficient progress demonstrating sustainability), sufficient capacity (human, management, financial, and technical), and alignment of necessary stakeholders.

For each active implementation initiative, a detailed operational implementation plan will be developed. Each plan will present the specific details required to make the plan actionable and sustainable once plan owners are provided execution approval authority and supplied with requested resources. Each plan will define:
• Specific Outcomes and Outputs
• Performance Measures and Metrics
• Envisioned Concept of Operations
• Implementation Approach
• Key Stakeholders and their Roles
• Major Activities
• Required Resources
• Required organizational Changes
• Communication, Outreach, and Change Management Approach

Each proposed plan will be accounted for in budget formulation processes and approved by the CEO and the National Board of Directors before commencing operations. The Strategic Planning Committee, the National Board, and the CEO will monitor progress toward implementation plan completion and outcome attainment by operational and execution teams, accountable organizations, and mission partners responsible for delivering services to our Autism community. These reviews will provide insightful analysis and recommendations to adapt the strategy and/or implementation plans for efficiency and effectiveness. The reviews will track schedule and budget execution; address current operational situations facing ASA; assess completeness of requirements delivery; and attainment of goals, targets, and objectives. This will inform course corrections that could encompass scope, schedule, resources, risk responses, compliance/enforcement actions, policy, operations, and future investments.

Implementing ASA’s Strategic Plan is not an endeavor free of risk. It is a fundamental premise that even given unlimited resources, time, and expertise, no organization will eliminate 100 percent of every possible threat or risk. Therefore, adopting strategies to reduce or mitigate ASA’s risk profile is a critical focus of the implementation plan, to include:

• Establishing a transparent decision making and governance structure that ensures an integrated and synchronized approach
• Prioritizing measures that enhance success and reduce threats and vulnerabilities to make the best possible use of resources
• Fostering partnerships to leverage existing and emerging capabilities
• Continuously monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of risk mitigation and risk reduction actions to manage vulnerabilities.
CONCLUSION

ASA delivers its mission to serve the Autism community in an ever-changing landscape. ASA’s 5-year Strategic Plan is a major step forward in ASA’s commitment towards improving the lives of all affected by Autism within a complex environment. The plan establishes an ambitious yet carefully crafted approach to enhancing delivery that enable ASA to execute its mission of providing high-quality information, products, and services while delivering on our promise.

Recognizing our society is in a constant state of technological change, this strategy is dynamic – a living strategy designed to be flexible and agile in addressing future and emerging needs while effectively tackling present day requirements in a sustainable and responsive manner. The strategy takes an assertive posture towards advancing the welfare of the entire Autism community. Each of the strategy’s goals and objectives are decomposed into outcome-driven actions, and ASA will manage progress towards each goal and objective through discrete performance measures. While constituent services are a prominent feature of the strategy, to be truly transformative, it must address actions necessary to make the organization more transparent, accountable, innovative, effective and integrated.

ASA firmly believes in the core principles of transparency, communication, and collaboration as critical elements to the strategy’s success. As such, the strategy takes a broad approach involving local, state, federal, and private sector partners, as well as the American public. Integrating the best our partners have to offer with feedback from those we serve will allow us to prioritize our investments and efforts towards achieve our desired outcomes. Throughout this transformation, our number one priority remains those whose lives are affected by Autism.