FACT SHEET

AUTISM CARES ACT

SUMMARY
There are bills to reauthorize the Autism CARES Act (H.R. 113-157). Due to a sunset provision, the law will expire in September 30, 2019 if not reauthorized before that date.

CARES stands for Collaboration, Accountability, Research, Education, and Support. President George W. Bush signed the original law in 2006, titled the Combating Autism Act (P.L. 109-419). The purpose of the law is to increase the federal government's response to the increasing numbers of individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). The law expanded and coordinated existing federal efforts: research being conducted within the National Institutes of Health (NIH), surveillance and awareness activities at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and professional development and research into evidence-based interventions at the Health, Resources, and Services Administration (HRSA). An Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC) ensures all federal agencies are coordinating their efforts, sharing information, and obtaining input from people on the autism spectrum and family members as well as other outside experts.

BACKGROUND
Since its enactment, the Autism CARES Act has helped to expand the number of health professionals trained to screen, diagnose (or rule out) autism and other developmental disabilities and to develop evidence-based interventions. Professionals are trained through the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) program and the Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics (DBP) training program. For fiscal years 2011-2014, the LEND and DBP programs provided interdisciplinary diagnostic evaluations to more than 224,000 children, trained nearly 16,000 pediatricians and other health professionals. By addressing the demand for these services, the LEND and DBP programs are reducing wait times for diagnostic evaluations, reducing the age of diagnosis, and helping to facilitate entry into effective interventions.


The law has also helped to build a critical infrastructure at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to further advance our understanding of autism. The Autism CARES Act supports the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network to estimate the number of children with ASD and other developmental disabilities. The ADDM reports are used to inform policy, improve service provision, and to conduct further analyses to understand ASD.

Autism Society 2019
In addition to ongoing population-based monitoring of ASD, the CDC’s CADDRE Network has been successful in implementing the Study to Explore Early Development (SEED), the largest collaborative scientific study the causes of autism.

The Autism CARES Act also supports NIH-funded research, including studies of the developmental processes underlying autism biology, research on the molecular and neurological underpinnings of ASD and gene function, and research on potential environmental risk factors and biomarkers for ASD, including gene-environment interactions.

During the 2014 reauthorization, the law required a General Accounting Office (GAO) report on transition services for students with disabilities. The report was published in August of 2017. It is hoped that the information from this report will lead to legislation to increase services for transitioning youth.

The Autism CARES Act has provided the most comprehensive attention to autism spectrum disorders (ASD) ever passed by Congress. While the law has made significant gains, there is still much more work to be done to help improve the quality of lives of individuals with autism and to support their families. With the most recent prevalence indicating 1 in 59 individuals being diagnosed with ASD, it is imperative that the law be reauthorized.

**CONGRESSIONAL ACTION**

On February 7, 2019, Representatives Chris Smith (R-NJ) and Mike Doyle (D-PA) introduced a bipartisan bill (H.R. 1058) to reauthorize and improve the Autism CARES Act for another five years. On the same day, Senators Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and Mike Enzi introduced a companion bipartisan bill (S. 427). The bill further expands the mission to include individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities across the lifespan; expands the interagency autism coordinating committee (IACC) to include agencies that provide services and supports to individuals in the community; and authorizes a report to research ways to increase the health and well-being of people with autism and other DD.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Congress should reauthorize the Autism CARES Act (H.R. 1058/S. 427) law before it expires on September 30, 2019.

**Committees of Jurisdiction**

House Energy and Commerce

Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP)