Overview

On March 11, 2021, President Joe Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) into law. The package provides $1.9 trillion in resources to help individuals and families survive the public health and economic crisis and funding to increase and distribute vaccines and other supplies that will help end the pandemic. It also includes the largest infusion of federal support for services for people with disabilities in over a decade. For the first time, this relief package provides targeted funding to support people with autism and other disabilities living at home or in group homes. It is also the first relief bill to provide targeted funding for special education under IDEA. This is all in addition to the funds provided in the first three relief packages.

Following is a summary of funding provided to states that affiliates should be aware of to help advocate for people with autism and families during the ongoing public health emergency. These funds should also be used to help build capacity in the state for recovery efforts and long-term reforms. Each section provides suggested action to take at the state level.

RESOURCES

The Federal Scoop American Rescue Plan Toolkit

- This toolkit provides a variety of information that will help state and local advocates encourage proper usage of federal funds in their communities.
$350 billion Coronavirus Relief Fund. State, tribal, and local governments can use this money to meet costs connected to the virus. States will receive funding from the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund which will provide money evenly split between the states and will provide additional funding to states based on unemployment rates. In addition, Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund will provide money directly to assist local governments. See how much each state will receive.

General Aid

Advocate with Governors to ensure that some of this money is used for essential needs of people with autism and other developmental disabilities. Build/join a state coalition with other disability organizations to advocate for these funds together such as the state chapters of The Arc, DD Councils, University Centers for Excellence in DD, and state Disability Rights network. Advocate that the state create a task force working to allocate the funding and ensure that the task force includes people with disabilities and advocates.
Home and Community-based Services

The American Rescue Plan (ARP) includes a temporary 10% boost to the federal matching rate in Medicaid (FMAP) through March of 2021, a provision strongly advocated by the Autism Society. This will result in a significant $12 billion infusion of funds into home and community-based services (HCBS). States must reinvest the added federal funding to supplement their annual expenditures on supports and services for people with disabilities. For example, states could reduce or eliminate HCBS waiting lists, add new services and programs or increase their availability, or increase low rates for HCBS providers to ensure adequate networks. It can also be used for behavioral health interventions and services. It is hoped that the boost in funding will be used by states to strengthen and modernize community-based systems that will outlast the pandemic. The Kaiser Family Foundation provides a table showing how much funding and additional funding each state will receive as a result of the ARP.

Administration for Community Living

In a previous relief package $955 million was provided for programs authorized under the Administration for Community Living (ACL) to support nutrition programs, home and community-based services, support for family caregivers, and expand oversight and protections for seniors and individuals with disabilities.

TAKE ACTION NOW

Contact the Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRC) in your state to advocate a portion of these funds to be used to support people with autism. Use the locator service to find one near you.

Work with the Centers for Independent Living (CIL) to ensure that people with autism are supported with these new funds.

Find your eligibility and an update for your Stimulus Checks through the IRS.
Child Financial Resources
The American Rescue Plan ensures that most working and middle-class families will receive an expanded child tax credit worth up to $3,600 for each child under the age of 6 and $3,000 for each child ages 6 through 17. Some of that will come in the form of checks from the government paid out over the year, rather than as a refund at tax time next April. In addition, it triples the maximum Earned Income Tax Credit for childless workers and increases the amount of the Child Tax Credit from $2000 to $3000 ($3600 for children under 6). These changes are predicted to reduce child poverty by 50 percent.

TAKE ACTION NOW
Find your family eligibility and an update for your Stimulus Checks through the IRS. Some resource to help individuals with navigating EITC/Child Tax Credit

Housing
The ARP supplements $25 billion in rental assistance aid in December's relief package by providing $21.6 billion in emergency rental assistance for low-income renters who have lost income or are experiencing other hardship; $5 billion for Housing Choice Vouchers for people recovering from homelessness and for renters at greatest risk of homelessness; $5 billion for homelessness assistance through the HOME Investment Partnerships Program; $750 million in housing aid for tribal nations and Native Hawaiians; and $139 million for rural housing assistance.

TAKE ACTION NOW
Contact the state and local housing authorities. Advocate to ensure that some of these funds are allocated to assist in the emergency housing needs of people with autism.
Child Care
The law supports child care and Head Start programs by including $39 billion total with $24 billion for the Child Care Stabilization Grants and $15 billion for the Child Care Development Block Grant Program. This Stabilization Grant funding will support 449,000 child care providers' operations during the pandemic. In addition, the Block Grant Program will expand care to 875,000 children. Head Start will also receive $1 billion to ensure resources are available to safely operate and provide services to families.

TAKE ACTION NOW
Contact your local child care office to ensure these funds are being used to include support for children with autism and the direct care providers.

Education
The American Rescue Plan Act provides $123 Billion to school districts in flexible funds to address the pandemic and its effects on student learning. This Act is the first relief bill to guarantee funding specifically to IDEA. Although money is specified for IDEA, Governors still have much discretion. FutureEd analyses of past relief dollars for education shows that 11 states used funds to address emotional needs of students and staff and 6 states used funds to assist students with disabilities.

- Part B of the IDEA: $2.5 million for grants to states
- Section 619 of IDEA: $200 million for Preschool Grants
- Part C of IDEA: $250 million for programs for infants and toddlers with disabilities
- Digital Learning: $7 million to ensure internet access for all students

TAKE ACTION NOW
Find out how much money your State will get for IDEA. The Learning Policy Institute created an interactive tool with a breakdown of the law's k-12 funding for each state that can help with advocacy at the state level. Contact your State Education Agency and Local Education Agency to advocate for these funds to target to address early identification, training and support staff to meet needs of students with disabilities, improving protection and advocacy services, and increasing state and district level reporting of discipline data, loss of instruction.
Advocate with Governors to ensure that state funds are used for special education services.
Advocate to ensure that some of these funds are allocated to assist in the emergency housing needs of people with autism.
Healthcare and Medicaid

There are a number of provisions that significantly increase access to affordable health care. Under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), individuals earning less than 150% of the federal poverty level (FPL) will be eligible for a health insurance plan with $0 premiums. Individuals between 150-400% FPL will benefit from lower required contributions to their premiums. And for the first time, individuals over 400% FPL will be eligible for tax credits and their premium contributions would be capped at 8.5% of income. These changes last for two years.

For all Medicaid beneficiaries, the ARP explicitly requires Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to provide testing, treatment, and vaccines without any cost-sharing.

The ARP includes a two-year incentive for the 14 states that have not yet expanded Medicaid under the ACA. In addition to receiving a 90% federal match for newly covering the expansion population, states would also receive an additional 5% federal funding for all other Medicaid populations for two years. According to the Center on Budget, this increase would more than pay for an expansion, providing states financial support in challenging budget times.

The ARP also provides federal coverage of 85% of the costs for mobile crisis response teams. These teams can help reduce harm to people undergoing mental health events by avoiding encounters with under-trained law enforcement and can free police to prioritize other activities.

See more information in this issue brief by the National Health Law Project as well as this summary by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

TAKE ACTION NOW

Help people with autism and families who need health care to sign up on Healthcare.gov.

Contact the state Medicaid office to advocate for funds to be used to help ensure that people with autism and other developmental disabilities are accessing vaccines and receiving other services and supports necessary to live in the community.

Contact the Medicaid office, the governor, and the state Developmental Disability Administration to advocate to use these funds to build capacity in the community such as changing the rate structure for direct support professionals.

Use NHELP guide to using Medicaid to help during COVID crisis.
FEDERAL RELIEF LAWS
AND FUNDING

Mental Health Services

The relief package provides $3.88 billion to expand on investments provided by the last COVID-19 Relief package to address the need for mental health services.

Unemployment Benefits

The American Rescue Plan will extend unemployment benefits until September 6, 2021 for the 18 million Americans who are unemployed. The amount will still be $300. The Act also includes extensions of the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program, which expands eligibility for the self-employed, gig workers, freelancers and others in non-traditional employment who do not qualify for regular unemployment insurance, as well as the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) program, which makes additional weeks of benefits available to workers who exhaust their state benefits. All other CARES Act and Families First Act unemployment programs are similarly extended until September 6.

Testing and Vaccination

In order to ensure vaccines reach every community as quickly as possible there is $7.5 billion in CDC funding for vaccine distribution in the ARP. There is also $5.2 billion for BARDA for vaccine and supplies procurement. The bill provides $48.3 billion for testing to help contain the virus and mitigate its effects, hire staff for contact tracing, provide PPE for frontline health workers, and take other steps to combat the virus.

TAKE ACTION NOW

Contact your local Community Behavioral Health Clinic to advocate for some of these resources to be used for mental health services for people with autism.

TAKE ACTION NOW

Find a Community COVID-19 Testing Center
Find a COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic

TAKE ACTION NOW

Assist people with autism in applying for unemployment benefits if they have lost their jobs.
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The CDC has a [comprehensive site](https://www.cdc.gov) with information about the Coronavirus, testing, and vaccines to prevent COVID-19 and end the pandemic. The Center for Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities provides specific information for people with autism and other disabilities. See the Center's [Toolkit for People with Disabilities](https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/cdc toolkit.html).

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)

CMS took several actions in response to COVID-19 aimed at allowing providers, health care facilities, and states more flexibility as they respond to the virus, and has established a [Medicaid.gov COVID-19 Resource Page](https://www.medicaid.gov) with the most up-to-date information.

Department of Education Guidance

The U.S. Department of Education has released the second part of its Education COVID-19 Handbook: [Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students’ Needs](https://www2.ed.gov). This volume addresses the social, emotional, mental-health, and academic impacts of the pandemic on students, educators, and staff. The first volume, [Strategies for Safely Reopening Elementary and Secondary Schools](https://www2.ed.gov), focused on health and safety measures that schools can use to reopen. These publications are part of the Department's broader goal of returning students to schools.


Housing and Urban Development

HUD's [COVID-19 Information and Resources landing page](https://www.hud.gov) has links to the latest guidance and information to assist homeless service systems, public housing agencies, assisted-housing providers, and other partners as they work together to address this crisis and support vulnerable households at the local level.

Department of Labor

- U.S. Department of Labor [resource page](https://www.dol.gov) for the pandemic.