

Sustaining the Benefits of Intensive Behavioral Health Services - Applied Behavior Analysis

- According to the Centers for Disease Control, autism spectrum disorder is diagnosed in 1 in every 44 children in the United States.
- The cost of supporting people with autism spectrum disorder over the course of their **lifetimes can cost as much as \$2.4 million** in the United States, according to a [study](#) published in *JAMA Pediatrics*.
- Early intervention can improve learning, communication, and social skills, as well as underlying brain development.
- Applied behavior analysis (ABA) and therapies based on its principles are the most researched and commonly used behavioral interventions for autism.

Access to evidence-based care improves outcomes and reduces lifetime costs.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania recognized this when it implemented Intensive Behavioral Health Services - Applied Behavior Analysis under the Behavioral Healthchoices Program.

Unfortunately, Pennsylvania autism service providers are struggling to provide applied behavior analysis **services** (ABA) to children with autism served through Intensive Behavioral Health Services (IBHS - ABA). This issue is perpetuated due to a **workforce crisis, unreimbursed training time, and low reimbursement rates.**

Issue

Unreimbursed Staff Training Time

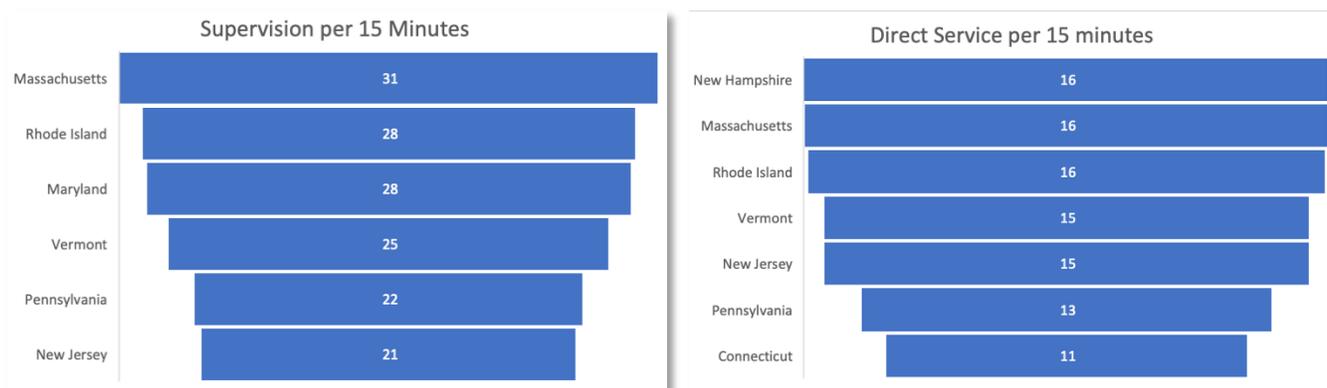
IBHS-ABA currently requires behavior health technicians to complete the 40-hour Registered Behavior Technician training before providing ABA services. If the individual has never



provided BHT services, 30 hours of training must occur prior to providing them. Because of the critical nature of training, most other states allow for reimbursement during this time.

Low Rate of Reimbursement

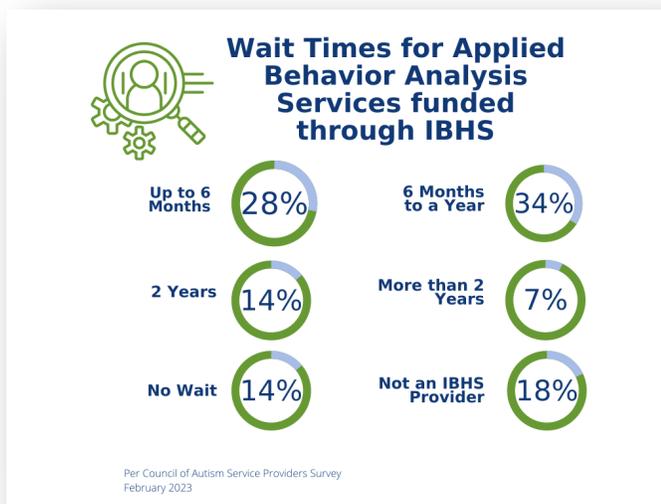
As indicated below, rates for ABA services funded through IBHS are some of the lowest in the region.



Impact

Combined with the ongoing workforce crisis, Pennsylvania's autistic children are languishing on wait lists.

The agencies that serve them are closing at record numbers.



Needed Action

- Appropriate funds to support an increase in rates for IBHS applied behavior analysis services to a viable level.
- Allow for reimbursement of services for behavior technicians while they undergo critical training.

DHS Services for Individuals with Intellectual Disability/Autism Spectrum Disorder

Issue

Currently, thousands of people with intellectual disabilities and/or autism spectrum disorder (ID/A) are struggling to access critical services.

- Inadequate staff wages, overtime, and inflation have resulted in an unprecedented crisis in care. T
- Service providers are downsizing because of this challenging fiscal environment.
- Even with reduced service capacity, statewide, the direct service provider vacancy rate remains at 28%. And the statewide staff turnover rate is approximately 40%.

Pennsylvanians with the most significant needs have extreme difficulty finding appropriate services.

Needed Action

- We respectfully request an investment of \$430 million in 2023-2024 state general funds which will provide a critical increase in wages for direct service providers and relieve the tremendous strain being placed on those with ID/A who cannot access the services they need.
- In addition, we urge your support to preserve the Home and Community-Based Services for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities Augmentation Account established in the 2022-2023 Fiscal Code. This Account ensures funds committed to Pennsylvania's remaining state centers (currently \$132.5 million in state funds), and any proceeds from their liquidation stay in the community ID/A system.