

Why Good Conservatives Can Support Autism Insurance Legislation

BACKGROUND:

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)

- Research supports the efficacy of intensive ABA – applied behavior analysis to treat children with autism. This treatment has been recognized by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the US Surgeon General, among others. Children who receive ABA are much more likely to live productive, independent lives.
- The earlier treatment is commenced, the greater the lifetime impact to the child. If autism is not treated, the child will likely require full time care for the rest of his or her life.
- In Arizona, in order to obtain ABA, parents have the option of becoming part of the welfare system by applying for ALTCS through AHCCCS or to private pay.
- No health insurance plans in Arizona offer coverage for ABA treatment.

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE

UPDATE – LESS OF A MANDATE

1. It wasn't long ago that the medical community believed that autism was untreatable. Today, research has proven otherwise. We are asking for insurers to update their coverage.

WELFARE SYSTEM

2. Families are forced to become part of the welfare system (ALTCS/AHCCCS) in order to provide life-changing treatment for their child because all health insurers in Arizona exclude autism and/or ABA coverage.

The welfare system was not designed to provide all treatment to all families. ALTCS was designed to be the payer of last resort. These families do not want to have to use this system; they want to be able to purchase coverage in the free market but there are no options available.

MARKET FAILURE

3. In a free market, when there is a market failure, government has a role to intervene.

THE CURRENT SYSTEM IS INADEQUATE

4. Due to the well below market pay, in the ALTCS/DDD system nearly all providers lack meaningful standards, are grossly underpaid, trained and supervised – and consequently, are much less effective. Those organizations with higher quality can only treat a limited number of children because they lose money with each child.

It is not uncommon for families to be placed on two years plus, waiting lists for ABA therapy when paid for by the State/ALTCS. The result is that most families must independently learn ABA, recruit and train therapists for their ABA provider, then manage a full-time program, recognizing that time is of the essence when it comes to building the connections in the brain of a child.

For those families attempting to avoid the welfare system by private paying, during the intense phase of treatment (typically until age 7), one parent is usually forced to abandon his or her career to facilitate the treatment, while at the same time, incurring the financial burden which can cost \$50,000 or more. Nearly no family can muster this burden, especially when it is incurred for more than one year.

The toll on families to obtain treatment for their children is crushing – in terms of the financial cost, the time, energy, and vigilance required.

CONSEQUENCES FOR STATUS QUO

5. Without treatment, the taxpayers of our State will bear the enormous financial burden of a life-time of care for children who live a normal life span and often need round the clock care. In contrast, many children who receive this intensive treatment require less support in school and go on to lead productive lives as taxpayers.

CONTRAST TO PREVIOUS DEFEATED MANDATES

6. In most instances, when legislation has been introduced to cover treatments, it has been to require that all insurers cover a particular treatment – when at least some of the carriers already provide the coverage. That legislation has been opposed, in part, because the free market was working; individuals could/can switch insurers to obtain the coverage. In the instance of autism coverage, there is no insurer offering coverage for this treatment; treatment that is recognized as effective by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the US Surgeon General.

ARIZONA ACTUARY FOUND ADDING COVERAGE WOULD COST .50% TO CURRENT PREMIUMS. ON AVERAGE, THAT WORKS OUT TO \$1.50 MORE A MONTH FOR MOST POLICIES.

7. The cost/benefit analysis to the State, to taxpayers, to families, to children's quality of life, to the school system is clear.

SPEECH THERAPY & OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

- Nearly every child with autism will be prescribed and utilize these therapies to address core challenges they face.
- Nearly every insurer in Arizona excludes coverage for these treatments for children with autism.
- Speech and occupational therapy occur once a week each, or less.