

3/26/15, Citizens Communication

Hello! A month ago I was here asking that the most effective and evidence based autism treatment, *Applied Behavior Analysis*, (ABA) be included in the City Of Austin Health Plan beginning in 2016. My spouse is an Austin firefighter, and we have a 10 year old son on the autism spectrum. We pay out of pocket for his therapy, as our requests for coverage have been denied by the City of Austin Human Resources Department for at least 4 years, I have lost count.

Two weeks ago, you also heard from fellow autism Mom & spouse of an Austin Police Officer, Lisa Whitted, about the financial struggles her family has endured, due to the lack of benefits provided in our current health plan for children with autism.

We are pleased to say, we now have the support of not only Council Member Garza, but also Council Member Kitchen, Council Member Renteria, and Mayor Pro Tem Tovo, who are all co-sponsoring a resolution to add ABA benefits to the health plan. We thank you all for recognizing the need & importance of adding this critical benefit.

In the coming weeks, this issue will be brought to the Health & Human Services Committee & then to council for a vote.

We want to be sure we have a chance to answer your questions & concerns. We have lined up a National expert on autism insurance from Autism Speaks, as well as a couple of local experts to discuss ABA, the importance of early intervention, and how ABA works. They will be speaking at an upcoming Health & Human Services Committee Meeting.

We would like to make you aware that there is a state law in Texas, SB 1484, that mandates ABA be covered by state regulated insurance plans, therefore, approximately 50% of companies in Texas already pay for ABA.

Unfortunately, there is an exemption for self-funded plans like ours, so the other 50% of insurance companies are allowed to opt-out of this critical coverage and it is up to *each employer* to do the right thing & provide this vital therapy that drastically improves the life of the person with autism, and their families. We recently found out that not only Austin ISD, but also Travis County voluntarily pay for ABA therapy.

What does ABA therapy do for individuals on the autism spectrum? ABA is a methodical way to teach people with autism every aspect of functioning in life. It is used to address global delays & challenges. Skills are broken down into very small manageable chunks and taught slowly so the child masters each step.

Over time, children with autism learn skills such as emotional regulation, how to deal with sensory issues & overstimulation, how to calm down and cope with change, thus avoiding tantrums and meltdowns, and what is expected of them in regards to behavior in public & social settings. ABA is also used to teach kids to speak & communicate, and it is used to teach nonverbal individuals to communicate with ipads and other electronic devices, so that every person with autism can be as highly functional as they can possibly be.

In the upcoming weeks, you will be asked to vote on adding Applied Behavior Analysis therapy to our health care plan. Please support us when this comes to a vote. No family should be denied getting their child the help they need to reach their full potential. Thank you.