A Snapshot of Autism Spectrum Disorder in Tennessee

Findings from the Tennessee Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network (TN-ADDM) help increase understanding about the number of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), the characteristics of those children, and the age at which they are first evaluated and diagnosed.

1 in 64
or 1.6% of 8-year-old children in an area of Tennessee were identified with ASD by TN-ADDM in 2016

White children were 1.4x more likely and black children were 1.6 times more likely
To be identified with ASD than Hispanic children

36% of children
Identified with ASD received a Comprehensive Developmental Evaluation by age 3 years

76% of children
Identified with ASD had a documented ASD diagnosis

By 51 months
half of children identified with ASD were diagnosed

IQ data available for 77%
Of children identified with ASD by TN-ADDM

IQ = Intelligence Quotient

*Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding
What are the key take-away messages in TN?

- There are many children with ASD who need services and support. The number of children identified with ASD in Tennessee increased from 1 in 68 (1.5%) in 2014 to 1 in 64 (1.6%) in 2016.
- Children with ASD in Tennessee have a wide range of abilities and challenges (such as 41% with IQ 70 or below).
- Most children with ASD in Tennessee (64%) are not evaluated prior to 3 years of age.
- The median age of diagnosis for children in Tennessee was 51 months of age.
- Hispanic children were less likely to be identified with ASD than black or white children. This may reflect differences related to lack of access to services, socioeconomic status, and cultural factors.

How can this information be useful?

TN-ADDM’s findings can be used to:
- Inform policies that promote earlier identification of ASD;
- Plan for the service needs of individuals with ASD and provide trainings related to ASD for healthcare providers and families; and
- Increase awareness of ASD among traditionally underserved families.

Stakeholders in Tennessee might consider different ways to:
- Lower the age of first evaluation by community providers.
- Increase awareness of ASD among Hispanic families and identify and address barriers in order to decrease the age at which all children are evaluated and diagnosed.

How and where was this information collected?

This information is based on the analysis of data collected from the health and special education records of children who were 8 years old and living in one of 11 counties in Middle Tennessee in 2016.

Tracking area
Bedford, Cheatham, Davidson, Dickson, Marshall, Maury, Montgomery, Rutherford, Robertson, Williamson, and Wilson counties

8-year-old children in tracking area: 25,839
- 63% white
- 20% black
- 14% Hispanic
- 3% Asian or Pacific Islander

"These new numbers show that the important work of early intervention is needed now more than ever. Autism is a condition we are continuing to learn more about and thanks to great partners around the state, not only are we diagnosing Autism faster but we are helping our children sooner through different therapy approaches. Missing one child is too many but I am encouraged by the strides children with Autism are making, as well as, the dedication of so many healthcare and research professionals."

– DIDD Commissioner Brad Turner