

From: **AUTISM SPEAKS**

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AUTISM SPEAKS LAUDS GOVERNOR KASICH FOR ADDING AUTISM BENEFITS TO OHIO'S ESSENTIAL HEALTH BENEFIT BENCHMARK PLAN

NEW YORK, NY (December 21, 2012) – Autism Speaks, the nation's leading autism science and advocacy organization, today applauded Governor John Kasich for including coverage for the treatment of autism in Ohio's Essential Health Benefits (EHB) benchmark plan.

"Autism Speaks commends Governor Kasich for his bold leadership and his commitment to supporting the autism community of Ohio," said Lorri Unumb, Autism Speaks' vice president of state government affairs. "Governor Kasich has listened to Ohio families impacted by autism and has responded decisively.

"Autism is a national public health crisis, and providing access to meaningful health insurance coverage for the treatment of autism is a fiscal and moral imperative," she said. "I think many of our nation's governors understand this, so I urge them to take advantage of the time-sensitive opportunity to add autism benefits to their exchange plans, whether or not they plan to operate their own exchange or select their own benchmark."

Recognizing the importance of effective intervention for individuals with autism, Governor Kasich has guaranteed that Ohioans with autism will have access to meaningful health insurance that includes coverage for Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) when purchased through Ohio's federally managed exchange beginning in 2014.

After close consultation with legislative leadership and members of both chambers who recently heard testimony on legislation to require private health insurance to cover for ABA for autism, Governor Kasich also made the decision to make autism benefits available to Ohio's state employees.

According to an Autism Speaks' analysis of state EHB benchmark plans, at least 22 of the 32 states that require private health insurance to cover for ABA for autism have included this benefit in their EHB benchmark plan. Unumb called on other state governors to follow Kasich's lead and add autism benefits to their EHB benchmark plans, even in states such as Ohio where this benefit is not currently required by law.

Any state that proposes a benchmark that does not include all 10 EHB categories required under the Affordable care Act must supplement the benchmark and may add autism benefits in the process. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has proposed a deadline of December 26, 2012 for states to provide the list of benefits they intend to include in their EHB benchmark plans.

To learn more about Autism Votes, an initiative of Autism Speaks focused on federal and state legislative advocacy, please visit www.autismvotes.org.