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Governor Christie Designates April as Autism Awareness Month

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Christie Administration Continues Commitment to New Jerseyans with Autism

Trenton, NJ – Recognizing the individual and unique needs of New Jerseyans with developmental disabilities, Governor Chris Christie declared April as Autism Awareness Month in the Garden State to encourage greater awareness of programs, services and opportunities that support individuals with autism. In addition, First Lady Mary Pat Christie has announced that Drumthwacket, the Governor's official residence, will be illuminated in blue tomorrow evening April 2, as part of World Autism Day. At the same time, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey will be lighting up the George Washington Bridge in blue for the month of April.

"National Autism Awareness Month is an appropriate time to highlight the fact that New Jersey has one of the best systems in the nation for identifying, diagnosing and caring for children and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders," said Governor Christie. "That's why this year's budget continues my Administration's firm commitment to assist residents with autism and their families by providing the tools they need to lead fuller, more productive lives."

Throughout April, members of the Administration, including Lt. Governor Kim Guadagno, First Lady Mary Pat Christie, Health Commissioner Mary O'Dowd, Human Services Commissioner Jennifer Velez and Children and Families Commissioner Allison Blake will showcase the work being done by individuals and organizations in New Jersey to serve people and families affected by autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Autism is a biologically-based disorder that impacts the development and functioning of a person's verbal and non-verbal communication skills, social interactions and patterns of behavior. Autism is estimated to affect 1 in 49 children in New Jersey, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC and Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) recently released a report that found similar rates across the country.

Furthering the Administration's commitment, Mrs. Christie and Health Commissioner O'Dowd joined the Governor's Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Autism last June to announce \$3.7 million in grants that created a New Jersey Autism Center of Excellence and a separate research site. The Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health at Montclair State University was awarded \$1.5 million over 5 years to establish a Center of Excellence to coordinate all autism research funded by the Governor's Council. Additionally, the Rutgers University Institute for Human Genetics was awarded \$2.2 million over 5 years to focus on the genetics of Autism.

The New Jersey Department of Health's electronic Autism Registry is another support service the Christie Administration administers to link parents and family members of individuals with autism to services. The Registry connects families to the appropriate diagnostic, treatment and support services in their communities. The Autism Registry requires medical professionals to register the children they are diagnosing with autism. As of January 2013, 10,590 children have been registered. This program is supported with \$500,000 in state funding.

The Governor's Fiscal Year 2014 Budget provides \$86 million for the Department of Health's Early Intervention System, a program aimed at identifying, diagnosing and caring for children from birth to age three with autism and other developmental disabilities. More than 20,000 children received early intervention services in state Fiscal Year 2012.

In August 2010, the Christie Administration established the Office on Autism within the Department of Human Services' Division of Developmental Disabilities, creating a centralized location to coordinate autism-related information. The Office has organized an Interdepartmental Work Group, which includes the New Jersey Departments of Human Services; Health; Children and Families; Community Affairs; Education; and Labor and Work Force Development, to enhance coordination among agencies charged with providing services to individuals with autism spectrum disorder.

Governor Christie and his Administration remain firmly committed to finding new and innovative ways to help New Jersey families impacted by autism spectrum disorders and improving the lives of their loved ones.

A copy of the Governor's proclamation [[pdf 1MB](#)]

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