

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

The adult autism services gap in 7 charts

Seven federal figures, none of them disputed. Put them in sequence and the gap between how many autistic adults exist and how many get served stops being an opinion and starts being arithmetic.

PILLAR: WHY | COMPANION TO BLOG POST B141 | 2-PAGE BRIEF

7

CHARTS, ONE ARGUMENT

Every one from a federal agency or a peer-reviewed journal.

How the gap opens

CAUSE TO CONSEQUENCE

STAGE 1

The population was counted

Prevalence went from 1 in 150 in 2000 to 1 in 31 in 2022. Those counted as children are adults now.

→

STAGE 2

The services were not built

Only 1.1% of working-age autistic adults who needed employment services received them. Over 600,000 people sit on HCBS waiting lists.

→

STAGE 3

The wait became the policy

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities wait an average of 37 months. Lifespan research drew 4.3% of autism research funding.

Twenty-five years of federal data

CDC, KFF, IACC, MILBANK

The seven charts, in the order they were published

Each milestone is a federal or peer-reviewed release. Read down and the sequence explains itself: the counting improved, the funding did not follow.

2000	Prevalence at 1 in 150 CDC ADDM identified autism in about 1 in 150 eight-year-olds. That cohort turned thirty in 2022.
2016	26.7% profound autism Across the 2000 to 2016 ADDM years, 26.7% of autistic eight-year-olds were nonverbal, minimally verbal, or had an IQ below 50.
2016	1.1% got employment help End of the Drexel study window. An estimated 1.98 million autistic adults who needed employment services received none.
2020	4.3% of research funding Lifespan issues, the category covering adult outcomes, was the smallest slice of the federal autism research portfolio.
2022	Prevalence at 1 in 31 CDC reported 32.2 per 1,000 across 16 sites, published April 2025.
2025	600,000 still waiting KFF counted over 600,000 people on HCBS waiting lists across 41 states, with a 37 month average wait for I/DD.

5.4 million

Autistic adults in the United States

No adult equivalent of the school system was ever built to serve them.

26.7%

Classified with profound autism

Roughly one in four. The adults the current service system serves worst.

37 months

Average I/DD wait for HCBS

Three years. Say that next to the phrase person-centered planning.

WHAT ONE NUMBER DOES IN A MEETING

“

Dana keeps a printout of the 37 month figure in the front pocket of her son Eli’s binder. When a case manager told her the wait was hard to predict, she slid it across the table. The conversation changed in about four seconds. Nobody argues with a federal average out loud.

ONE NUMBER. ONE MEETING. ONE DIFFERENT ANSWER.

THE TAKEAWAY

Any single figure here can be argued with. In sequence they survive that, because they come from the CDC, a federal advisory committee, a peer-reviewed journal, and a nonpartisan health policy foundation, not from advocacy.

TURN THE PAGE

How to turn one statistic into a letter that lands, the sources to cite, and what to ask a legislative office for.

Turning a number into an argument

ONE CHART, ONE NAME

PICK

Choose the one figure that fits

☐ Waiting on a waiver? Use 600,000 and 37 months

☐ Denied employment support? Use 1.1%

☐ High support needs? Use 26.7% profound autism

☐ Told adult research is coming? Use 4.3%

☐ Told autism is a childhood issue? Use 5.4 million

SOURCE

Find the primary document

☐ CDC MMWR Surveillance Summaries, not a news article

☐ KFF waiting list survey page, current year

☐ The Milbank Quarterly for the 1.1% figure

☐ IACC portfolio analysis for research funding

☐ Save the PDF, you will use it more than once

WRITE

Two sentences and a citation

☐ Name, age, and what your adult child needs

☐ How long you have waited, with dates

☐ The federal figure, with its source named

☐ One specific ask, not a general appeal

☐ A request for a written reply

SEND

Where it actually goes

☐ Your state representative and state senator

☐ Your U.S. House member and both U.S. senators

☐ Your PIHP regional office, copied

☐ Your Community Mental Health director

☐ File every reply, including the non-answers

BRING ONE PAGE, NOT A BINDER

The one-page numbers sheet

01

The figure

One number, stated plainly, with the agency that published it.

02

The source

Report name, year, and page or table. Make it checkable.

03

Your family

Two sentences. Name, age, need, and how long you have waited.

04

The ask

One specific action, with a date you want an answer by.

YOUR MOVE

From statistic to written answer

1

Pick one figure

The one that matches your family most exactly.

2

Get the primary source

The agency report, not the news write-up.

3

Write two sentences

Your adult child, named, with dates.

4

Send to both chambers

State and federal, same email text.

5

Keep the reply

A written non-answer is itself evidence.

Nobody in a hearing room has ever been moved by seven charts at once. They get moved by one chart and one name. Bring both.

SOURCES

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JP

Jim Palasty

Jim Palasty is the founder of OASIS for Autism and a single father of an adult autistic daughter in Michigan.