

*April is Autism Awareness Month*

**(Rochester, MN)** – Advocates involved in the fight to find the causes of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) and to establish effective treatments gained ground last month with the passage of federal health insurance reforms. Congressman Walz joined parents of children with ASDs, State Rep. Kim Norton, and school district and county officials who provide services to these children on Friday to discuss the new changes and the challenges individuals with ASDs continue to face.

“Health care reform was vital for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders because these individuals often experienced discrimination by insurance companies who refused to cover treatments, dropped their coverage, or refused to pay for adaptations to their home and work environments that made life easier. Health care reform is a major step forward for those living with and the families who love and support individuals with Autism,” said Congressman Walz.

“The diagnosis of Autism is an emotional one for families, and the RT Autism Awareness Foundation wants people to know that they are not alone,” said Brad Trahan, who along with his wife Joanie started the local foundation which assists communities in establishing Project Lifesaver and raises awareness of Autism Spectrum Disorders.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that 1 on 110 children in the U.S. have an Autism Spectrum Disorder. “The increasing rate of autism in our children is cause for alarm,” continued Walz. “We’re taking aggressive action to combat this disease at the federal level and I’m honored to be joined today by tireless advocates in the Rochester community who are fighting these disorders in the state legislature and here in Olmsted County.”

Health care reform includes several initiatives that will impact persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders. These reforms go into effect on a rolling basis between 2010 and 2014;

1. The law prohibits insurers from excluding coverage based on pre-existing conditions and also prevents insurers from selectively refusing to renew coverage;
2. Insurers will no longer be able to charge people vastly different premiums based on their health status, gender or occupation;
3. A standardized annual out-of-pocket spending limit will be established so that no family would face bankruptcy due to medical expenses;
4. Annual and lifetime benefit caps on coverage are prohibited;
5. Mental health care is covered;
6. Individuals may remain on their parents health insurance up to their 26<sup>th</sup> birthday;
7. “Habilitative” and “maintenance services” will now be covered by insurers; and

U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius has already started the process to create a high-risk pool to provide immediate assistance to those currently uninsured with pre-existing conditions before insurance market reforms are implemented. This will be beneficial to families and individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders who have lost insurance or who are struggling to pay ever-increasing premiums that insurances companies justify based on an ASD diagnosis.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, signed into law in 2009 also included an additional \$10 billion in funding for research on Autism conducted by the National Institutes of Health.

April is Autism Awareness month. For more information about Autism Spectrum Disorders, visit [www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism)

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