



## Statement on Autism Prevalence

from the Autism Services, Education, Resources, and Training Collaborative (ASERT)



Recent press and media reporting has focused on the increasing autism prevalence in the United States. Prevalence is the proportion of a population that is impacted by a disease, disorder, or diagnosis. There are multiple criteria and combinations of criteria to identify or diagnose autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Similarly, there are also many ways to determine prevalence.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network estimates ASD prevalence among the nation's children, based on a clinical analysis of medical records and, where available, educational records of 8-year-old children from 11 monitoring sites across the United States. In April of 2018, the CDC reported new estimates of the ASD prevalence in the US: 1 in 59 children, an increase of 15% from 1 in 68 in 2016. Learn more about the CDC ADDM Network here: <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/addm.html>.

In December 2018, two studies were released which reported a higher prevalence of ASD for children in the US, compared to the April 2018 CDC ASD prevalence rate. The increased prevalence was generated from phone surveys of families across the US in 2014, the National Health Interview Survey and the National Survey of Children's Health, which asked families to respond, online or by mail, to questions about their children.<sup>1 2</sup>

Estimating prevalence, or the proportion of a population with a disorder or diagnosis, is best established through surveillance. Surveillance refers to examining the entirety of a population for a disorder or diagnosis. Other methods, like phone surveys, rely upon families who can be reached and who respond. Additional differences, including how data are calculated, what part of the US is studied, researchers' access or lack of access to types of records, and even how a question is worded can impact prevalence estimates.

The CDC's ADDM network is the largest population-based surveillance program to monitor ASD and most sites of the ADDM network utilize both health and education records. By using population surveillance and clinical experts who validate the ASD diagnosis, the ADDM network produces a valid estimate of ASD prevalence.

The prevalence of ASD is crucial to making sure that policies and programs can plan for all individuals with an autism spectrum disorder who need services. Advances in diagnosis, interventions and treatments, and appropriate programming across the life span will only benefit from accurate autism prevalence, ultimately leading to a better quality of life for all impacted by ASD.

<sup>1</sup> Xu G, Strathearn L, Liu B, et al. Prevalence and Treatment Patterns of Autism Spectrum Disorder in the United States, 2016. *JAMA Pediatr.* 2018

<sup>2</sup> Kogan MD, Vladutiu CJ, Schieve LA, et al. The Prevalence of Parent-Reported Autism Spectrum Disorder Among US Children. *Pediatrics.* 2018;142(6).



Pennsylvania's leading source  
of autism-related resources  
and information.

**877-231-4244**

The Autism Services, Education,  
Resources and Training  
Collaborative (ASERT) is a  
statewide initiative funded by the  
Bureau of Autism Services, PA  
Department of Human Services.