



**For Immediate Release**

December 21, 2012

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## **Ohio to Expand Availability of Services for Children with Autism**

*State's Autism Center Supports Expanded Assistance to Parents and Families Around Ohio*

COLUMBUS, OH – Ohio Governor John Kasich announced expanded access to health care coverage for children with autism at a press conference this morning. Autism services will be included as part of the “essential health benefit” package that federal law requires in every state beginning in 2014. The decision was made by Governor Kasich following close talks with legislative leaders and members of both chambers.

OCALI, the state’s clearinghouse on autism resources and professional development, commended today’s announcement. The Center promotes the highest possible achievement of each child on the autism spectrum. “We fully support changes that will have a positive and meaningful impact on the lives of every child diagnosed with autism,” said Executive Director Shawn Henry. “Expanded health care coverage is an essential part of the high-quality services needed for an individual’s development and success. It’s a key part of cultivating essential services across an individual’s lifespan.”

“We applaud today’s announcement and are excited to continue our work with the Kasich administration and legislative leaders across the state as we move forward with providing essential services and supports for individuals with autism,” said Henry. “This work will further Ohio’s role as a national leader and provider of meaningful change and development.”

The announcement follows two initiatives recently released through the Governor’s Office of Health Transformation – including The First Five Years: A Whole Child Approach to Autism Spectrum Disorder and the Employment First Initiative. “These initiatives are instrumental in expanding opportunities for individuals on the autism spectrum,” said Henry. “Governor Kasich and Ohio legislators continue to show strong leadership and support of individuals with autism and developmental disabilities.”

Earlier this year, OCALI’s Advisory Board, in conjunction with Ohio’s Interagency Work Group on Autism, developed a list of 15 recommendations for supporting Ohioans with autism and helping them achieve meaningful and successful lives. The recommendations were developed based on feedback received from parents and professionals across the state through a series of town-hall style meetings. “The recommendations provide a framework for important services and supports of individuals from early diagnosis through elementary, middle, high school, postsecondary education and the transition into adulthood,” said Henry. “Collaboration among the state’s key agencies will allow us to leverage our leadership, knowledge, and resources as we continue to research and develop evidence-based practices that will meet the needs of individuals and parents across Ohio.”

One of the fifteen recommendations promotes health insurance coverage for individuals with ASD.

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Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are a group of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication, and behavioral challenges. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that an average of one in 88 children in the United States have an ASD.

Ohio’s Interagency Workgroup on Autism (IWGA), convened by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, is coordinating efforts among state agency partners so that the gifts, talents, wishes and needs for Ohioans with ASD are recognized, valued and addressed. For more information visit the IWGA website at <http://www.iwg-autism.org>.

OCALI serves families, educators, and professionals working with students with autism and low-incidence disabilities, including multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairments, other health impairments and traumatic brain injuries. OCALI’s mission is to build state- and system-wide capacity through leadership, training and professional development, technical assistance, collaboration and technology.