Message from the Director

Dear friends and colleagues,

April is National Autism Awareness Month, which provides an excellent opportunity to promote autism awareness, autism acceptance and to bring attention to the many people facing an autism diagnosis each year. The Sonoran UCEDD joined the autism community by participating in the 10th Annual Autism Society of Greater Tucson Piece the Puzzle Walk/Run & Resource Fair on April 9th and is working with other faculty and staff at U of A seeking a spectrum of solutions through the UA Autism Collaborative. We have highlighted many state and national activities and developments in this issue’s Spotlight on Autism.

As always, please let us know what you would like to see in future issues.
All the best,

Leslie J. Cohen
Director

Thanks to your generous support, we continue to ensure that equal opportunities and a quality of life are accessible to all persons with developmental disabilities. If you would like to learn more about making a tax-deduction gift to one of these vital programs, please contact John Fung, Director of Development, at 520-626-7383 or by email at jbfung@email.arizona.edu.

You may also make a gift online through the University of Arizona Foundation Sonoran UCEDD designation at http://www.uafoundation.org/give/fund/02110101564
It’s April again which means we can count on a few things; spring is in the air, families are preparing for the end of the school year, and Autism Awareness is all over the media. That’s right, April is Autism Awareness month and this month has already been packed.

The Arizona Developmental Disabilities Surveillance Program (ADDSP) released the results of its study to measure the prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) within the state and recognized that 1 out of 66 children were identified with ASD. They also noted that even though “most children identified with ASD had concerns about their development noted in their health and/or special education records by age 3 years, less than half of children with ASD received a comprehensive developmental evaluation by the same age.” This goes to show that the service system for those diagnosed with ASD still has a lot of opportunity for improvement.

However, a lot of momentum has been generated over the last year, for this very purpose; system improvement. In response to passionate grassroots advocacy as well as a 2014 Center for Medicaid (CMS) bulletin that “Clarified Medicaid Coverage of Services to Children with Autism”, Governor Ducey and his Policy Advisor for Health and Human Services, Christina Corieri, formed an ASD Advisory Committee. This committee was “charged with articulating a series of recommendations to the State for strengthening the health care system’s ability to respond to the needs of AHCCCS members with ASD.” I was honored to be a part of this collection of providers, administrators, health plans, state agencies, advocates, parents and other stakeholders. Together we created an 80 page community report that addressed the areas of Early Identification and Referral, Reducing System Complexity, Evidence-Based Treatment, Building Network Capacity and Adults with ASD. The Governor personally hosted this group on April 5th and promised to keep this issue on the forefront of policy development. You can read the full report on AHCCCS’ website. https://www.azahcccs.gov/shared/asd.html

Finally, our local community continues to come out in support of those impacted by ASD. On Saturday April 9th, the Autism Society of Southern Arizona (ASSA) held its 10th annual Autism Walk, with record numbers. Over 2000 people attended the event in order to learn more information, raise money, and honor the ASD community. One hundred percent of the funds raised stay local, and are used to support programs such as Lego Groups, Sensory Friendly Films, Social Skill Groups, and Basketball Camps. You can learn more at (as-az.org).

So this month as you prepare to wrap up the school year, remember to smell the spring flowers and keep an eye out for opportunities to learn more about someone who is diagnosed with ASD.
Bringing Autism Awareness to the UA and Southern AZ
UA Autism Collective

The UA Autism Collective is a consortium of University of Arizona researchers and practitioners who seek to gain greater understanding of autism and related neurodevelopmental disorders. The group consists of members from diverse academic disciplines, based in the Colleges of Education, Science, Medicine, Agriculture, Public Health and Business, as well as leaders of programs that provide services and support to families and persons across the spectrum. The Sonoran UCEDD has been part of the group since its’ inception.

The purpose of the Collective is to improve the health and educational outcomes of families, children, and adults with autism spectrum conditions. The Collective uses the following three pillars to advance the realm of research and service:

1. Research & assessment
2. Program development
3. Community outreach

Faculty and staff are teaming up to create a wide range of engagement opportunities for currently enrolled UA students, the UA community, as well as the greater community of Southern Arizona. The UA Autism Collective members are working in partnership to advance autism awareness.

For a list of programs, research initiatives and members please visit our website at http://uaautismcollective.lab.arizona.edu/

Administration on Disabilities Commissioner Aaron Bishop’s Remarks on New Autism Surveillance Data

Late last month, Administration on Disabilities Commissioner Aaron Bishop’s Blog was devoted to the work needed in raising expectations and opportunities for individuals with Autism.

Commissioner Bishop said “We need to have higher expectations for people with disabilities, in everything including academic achievement. We must empower them to do more than stay at home or work in non-integrated settings, like sheltered workshops. We also must take action to structure our communities and workplaces to embrace neurodiversity and benefit from these individuals’ strengths.

To achieve this, we must ensure services are available to support children with autism through all stages of life—from early childhood and the school years, as they look toward college and employment, and ultimately as they live independently as adults.”

Commissioner Bishop commended the work of the 67 UCEDDs across the country to help make this happen. For the full text: http://acl.gov/NewsRoom/blog/2016/2016_03_31.aspx
Sesame Street and Autism: See Amazing in All Children

The second phase of the Emmy-nominated autism initiative, Sesame Street and Autism: *See Amazing in All Children*, has released 12 new videos featuring children with autism and Abby Cadabby, plus a new animation featuring Julia, a preschool muppet with autism. The new content is part of a suite of free resources for families, teachers, providers and caregivers available on the Sesame Street website and as an app for iOS and Android.

These resources are designed to destigmatize and build understanding about autism spectrum disorder, which affects one in 68 American children. Celebrating both the uniqueness of every child and the things all children share in common, the suite of content includes:

**Sesame Street and Autism: See Amazing in All Children**
A two-minute animation of *We’re Amazing 1, 2, 3!* Featuring Julia, Elmo, and Abby, bringing the storybook to life.

- 50,000 *We’re Amazing 1, 2, 3!* story books, adding to the 10,000 books already distributed to 250+ organizations.
- “Sesame Street and Autism” app, now available for free on all Apple and Android devices.
- Behind-the-scenes footage from Exceptional Minds, the non-profit vocational animation studio where young adults with autism helped create “Benny’s Story”, featured in the original set of resources.

If you have any questions, are interested in learning more about this initiative or would like to order *We’re Amazing, 1, 2, 3!* books, please visit [http://autism.sesamestreet.org/](http://autism.sesamestreet.org/)

Autism Therapy to Become Mandatory Benefit for Federal Workers

The nation’s largest employer will require that all of its health insurance plans cover applied behavior analysis for kids with autism beginning next year. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management said all health plans within the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program – which covers federal employees, retirees and their dependents – must include the behavior therapy starting in 2017. They have now determined that appropriate coverage of ABA treatment by all plans/options is necessary, therefore the 2017 plan year, carriers may no longer exclude ABA for the treatment of autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

The move comes three years after federal officials began encouraging plans that service government workers to include ABA coverage. At present, however, many federal employees remain without the benefit. Advocates say that the mandate from the nation’s largest employer-sponsored health benefits program is a step in the right direction. Already, legislation has been passed in 43 states requiring at least some insurance plans to cover ABA.
Upcoming Events

5th Annual 2016 Transdisciplinary Autism Conference
The 5th annual Transdisciplinary Autism Conference is a community event for parents and professionals with over 15 renowned speakers. Presentations include a wide range of topics for parents and professionals of all backgrounds, and many presentations.

April 29-30, 2016
Desert Willow Conference Center
4340 E. Cotton Center Blvd
Phoenix, AZ

For more information and to register, visit http://sonoranucedd.fcm.arizona.edu/event/2016-transdisciplinary-autism-conference

47th Annual Autism Society National Conference and Exposition
The Autism Society’s Conference is a unique opportunity to join others with the ability to bring about systems change and improve the lives of all individuals living with ASD. Be a part of the largest autism conference in the country.

July 13-16, 2016
New Orleans, LA

For more information, visit http://www.autism-society.org/get-involved/conference/registration/

To find information about community events and trainings throughout the state of Arizona as well as nationally, please go to our Community Events Calendar on the Sonoran UCEDD website: http://sonoranucedd.fcm.arizona.edu/community_events

Sonoran UCEDD Updates

FREE Short Film Premiere on Cross-Border Healthcare Initiatives
Short film on cross-border healthcare initiatives featuring the work of the Arizona Sonora Border Projects for Inclusion – or ARSOBO - the UA College of Medicine’s Office of Global & Border Health and Sonoran University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD). After the screening, a panel of experts will discuss accessible, affordable health care, cross-border relations, and how lessons learned could help expand this work.

April 21, 2016
The Loft Cinema
3233 E. Speedway
Tucson, AZ

For more information and a flyer, visit http://sonoranucedd.fcm.arizona.edu/event/short-film-premiere-cross-border-healthcare-initiatives
UCEDD Receives Grant from the Special Hope Foundation
Evidence-Based Cost and Quality of Care Research Grants for Adults with Developmental Disabilities

Dr. Tammie Bassford and the Sonoran UCEDD received a recent grant from the Special Hope Foundation to evaluate health outcomes for the youth and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) who have received care in our model coordinated primary care program. We will compare quality and cost outcomes for our program patients to those in the population of youth/adults with I/DD served by AHCCCS Medicaid Program statewide.

The mission of the Special Hope Foundation is to promote the establishment of comprehensive health care for adults with developmental disabilities designed to address their unique and fundamental needs. This is the third grant the Sonoran UCEDD has received from the Foundation to improve health care for adults with I/DD in Arizona. We are grateful to the Foundation for its help!

Sonoran UCEDD Newest Staff Member - Increasing Employment First in Arizona!

The Sonoran UCEDD is pleased to announce that Susan Voirol has joined the UCEDD as Phoenix Manager for Employment First and Transition Initiatives. In partnership with Arizona Department of Economic Security Rehabilitative Services Administration we were able to develop this new position to focus on furthering policies, practices and collaborations to increase integrated and competitive employment of youth and adults with disabilities in Arizona. Stay tuned for a new Employment First Website to be unveiled in the near future.

Susan will also be working with the Sonoran UCEDD faculty and staff to develop innovative projects and resources for successful transitions for youth with disabilities into adulthood. Susan is well equipped for this role having most recently been employed with the Arizona Department of Education as a Transition Specialist, providing education around transition services across the state. Her past work experience includes holding a district Transition Coordinator position in a local public high school, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and a job developer for a local provider agency. In addition, she is an active member of local, state and national committees and boards all addressing improving successful outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Join us in welcoming Susan to the UCEDD. She can be reached at svoirol@email.arizona.edu.
Current UCEDD Trainee Spotlight: Shivani Misra

Shivani has been a Sonoran UCEDD trainee since January of 2015 and is pursuing the UCEDD sponsored Undergraduate Certificate in Developmental Disabilities. She is a Flinn Scholar, graduating in May from the Honors College with a Bachelor of Science degree in Neuroscience and Cognitive Science, with an emphasis on Aging and Development. Additionally, she will receive minors in Public Health and Biochemistry. She is the Outstanding Senior for both the Neuroscience and Cognitive Science Department, as well as for the College of Science. She also is the recipient of the Freeman Medal, awarded to two U of A students that showcase upstanding moral character. Finally, she was honored as a Galileo Circle Scholar for the second year, for her research related work.

Shivani is a first generation American who is passionate about making this world a better place. She is interested in Maternal and Child Health and sits on the Board of Directors for the Southern Arizona Division of the March of Dimes. She has conducted many social awareness campaigns; including one she organized in the slums of Odisha, India to generate awareness about the importance of proper nutrition and folic acid intake during pregnancy.

Shivani aspires to decrease the stigma and eliminate the disparity associated with disability. As a Sonoran UCEDD trainee, she teaches Pilates and movement to students from the Arizona School for the Deaf and Blind. She also is a research assistant in Dr. Jamie Edgin’s Memory Development and Disorders and Down Syndrome Research Group Labs. There, she is completing her Honors Thesis about how inefficient sleep of infants with Down syndrome affects their language outcomes. Additionally, she spent three months in Melbourne, Australia conducting research at the Royal Children’s Hospital.

On campus, she is an ambassador for the College of Science, Neuroscience and Cognitive Science, Undergraduate Biology Research Program, Pre-MD, and Honors College. Through these avenues, she tries to bridge the gap between science and the community. She has hosted outreach events and given presentations at various venues. She helped create a peer-mentoring program within her major and helped set up the annual show, Symbiosis—an art showcase representing the coalescence of art and science.

Shivani is thrilled to continue learning and helping the world at the University of Arizona College of Medicine—Phoenix where she will pursue an MD/MPH.

ArtWorks Artists Exhibit at the U of A Museum of Art

The University of Arizona Museum of Art (UAMA) recently dedicated a gallery space to UA community programs and partners. Twenty-four Sonoran UCEDD ArtWorks artists with intellectual and developmental disabilities will exhibit their art pieces from March 18 – May 8, 2016. To inspire unique artistic expressions for their original art pieces, artists visited the UAMA; unlike a conventional museum educational tour, these UAMA visits were individually tailored to the artists’ own interests.
Mica View Trail in Tucson to Become ADA Compliant

A popular trail east of Tucson, Mica View Trail, in the Saguaro National Park will be upgraded to make it accessible to visitors who use a wheelchair or other equipment to assist with mobility. The estimated re-open date of the 0.7 mile trail is scheduled for May 2016. This project will make it easier for visitors with limited mobility to enjoy this national park. The trail will meet standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act for recreation trails. This project will be partially funded through grants from the Friends of Saguaro National Park and the Arizona Trails Heritage Fund.

For more information on trail improvements in the Saguaro National Park, as well as a map of the Mica View Trail, visit http://www.nps.gov/sagu/learn/management/trails-plan-implementation.htm

Phoenix Passes Nation’s Strongest Disability Protections

The Phoenix City Council approved a new policy which includes the nation’s strongest requirements under the American with Disabilities Act for ground transportation at the airport. The updated policy allows ride-sharing services like Uber and Lyft to pick up passengers at the airport. It also now ensures that travelers with disabilities can arrange to be picked up at the airport with wheelchair-accessible vehicles, including from ride-sharing services, within 30 minutes.

“Sky Harbor will be the largest airport in the country to require every transportation provider to make arrangements for those in the disability community. This is not just the right thing to do, disability travel is a multi-billion-dollar industry, and members of this community should not just be handed a list of phone numbers in hopes that they'll somehow find transportation. Accessibility is critical for everyone.”

Arizona Children's Health Survey

Based on Arizona’s current population (1.5 million) approximately 300,000 children with special health care needs live in Arizona. The Arizona Department of Health Services, Office for Children with Special Health Care Needs (OCSHCN) wants to more clearly understand the experiences of families in meeting their children’s needs, across the state.

Your voice is important! Please take 6 - 8 minutes to complete this short survey. The results will help identify what is currently working and what areas might need to be improved to help families like yours.

Survey in English:
https://survey.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_cGTJKAjbSOInnpP&ct=t(2016_0307_%5BMonday%5D_Memo_w_Legislative_Update)&Q_JFE=0

Survey in Spanish:
https://survey.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_9TFsYZ66SRXPPnf&ct=t(2016_0307_%5BMonday%5D_Memo_w_Legislative_Update)&Q_JFE=0
Federal Proposal Calls for Disability Hiring Quota

Under a new proposal, the federal government would be required to take steps to utilize affirmative action to increase the number of workers with disabilities.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has proposed a new rule that would require federal agencies to work toward a 12 percent workforce representation rate for people with disabilities and a 2 percent representation rate for those with targeted or severe conditions including intellectual disabilities.

The rule calls for government agencies to provide personal assistance to employees with disabilities who need help with basic human functions such as eating and using the restroom. The rule would require them to take steps to increase their hiring retention of people with disabilities. Federal agencies already must have affirmative action plans for hiring people with disabilities under Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act. No single rule has every outlined what those policies should look like. The EEOC is attempting to clarify expectations with this current proposal.

Obama Administration Aims to Curb Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Special Education

New data from the U.S. Department of Education shows that disparities continue in the nation’s schools, with minority students in many districts far more likely to be identified as having disabilities and more frequently facing suspensions and other discipline. Despite requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to flag these issues, they are often unnoticed.

The U.S. Department of Education is looking to change the trend by proposing a new rule that would require states to use a standardized approach to assess representation in special education across racial and ethnic groups.

As of now, districts with disparities must use 15 percent of their IDEA funds for early intervention services for students who are not yet identified as having disabilities starting in kindergarten. Under the new proposal, schools would be able to use those funds to serve kids with and without disabilities beginning in preschool.

The proposed rule will be up for public comment prior to being finalized. To view the unofficial copy of the rule visit [http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/files/nprm-significant-disproportionality--unofficial-copy.pdf](http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/files/nprm-significant-disproportionality--unofficial-copy.pdf)

Join our Mailing List!

The Sonoran UCEDD produces a variety of publications, including *Sonoran UCEDD News*, that communicate the ways we are connected to individuals and activities in Arizona and across the country. If you would like to be added to our mailing list, please [click here to subscribe to our newsletter](http://sonoranucedd.fcm.arizona.edu/newsletter) or call 520-626-0442.

Current and archived issues of the newsletter can be viewed at [http://sonoranucedd.fcm.arizona.edu/newsletter](http://sonoranucedd.fcm.arizona.edu/newsletter).

If you would like to receive this document in an alternate format, please call the Sonoran UCEDD at 520-626-0442.

To submit comments or news items, please email the Editor, Sacha Cueto, at [ucedd@email.arizona.edu](mailto:ucedd@email.arizona.edu)