



STATE OF TENNESSEE
COMPTROLLER OF THE TREASURY
JUSTIN P. WILSON, COMPTROLLER
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NEWS RELEASE

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Report Series Examines Public Services for Infants, Children and Youth with Autism in Tennessee

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – The first in a series of reports examining public services for infants, children and youth with autism in Tennessee was released today by the Comptroller of the Treasury’s Offices of Research and Education Accountability (OREA).

The report, “Autism in Tennessee: Part 1 – An Introduction to Issues and Data Collection Methods,” provides an overview of autism as a disability, a review of associated laws and includes autism data collection and prevalence estimates. Subsequent reports to be released in the series will review public education and health care services as they relate to autism in Tennessee.

According to the report, the number of children and youth receiving autism-related special education services in Tennessee more than tripled from approximately 1,293 to 4,019 between 2001 and 2007. However, it is not known whether those numbers have risen because of an increased prevalence of autism or because autism is being identified and diagnosed more frequently.

The report also points out that it is difficult to obtain accurate, reliable information on who receives autism-related services, which services they receive and where those services are available because data and records are not coordinated and collected at the state level by one centralized organization. Currently, there are at least six separate state agencies and many organizations at the regional, district and local level - including non-profits and disability advocacy groups - that provide and administer health and education resources and services for autism.

“One way to capture an accurate snapshot of autism in Tennessee would be to authorize a state-level entity to access all available records and data from various sources,” said Joseph Woodson, OREA legislative research analyst and author of the report. “Right now, Tennessee does not have a method for doing so.”

Over the past decade, some states have created autism registries to evaluate services and inform constituents of available services. An autism registry for Tennessee, similar to those already existing in the state for medical conditions such as traumatic brain injuries, birth defects and cancer, could provide specific information on statewide capacity for early identification of and intervention for autism.

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Funding for a registry would have to be addressed. OREA reviewed the existing registries in Tennessee and found they have annual budgets between \$82,600 and \$978,600. However, funding has been available to states for autism data collection and analysis through federal grants in the past.

“Comprehensive and accurate data could assist our lawmakers with making informed autism-related policy decisions, help identify funding needs and help connect Tennessee’s families with the most appropriate services,” Comptroller Justin P. Wilson said.

Two versions of the report my viewed or downloaded.

Limited source information:

<http://www.comptroller1.state.tn.us/Repository/RE/AutismPart1Web.pdf>

Complete source information:

<http://www.comptroller1.state.tn.us/Repository/RE/AutismPart1Sources.pdf>

To receive notification when subsequent reports in this series are released, you may sign up for email notifications on the OREA Website page: www.tn.gov/comptroller/orea

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About OREA: The Comptroller’s Offices of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) support the General Assembly, the Comptroller and the public with accurate and objective policy research and analysis. This year marks the 15th anniversary of OREA.

The offices have issued reports covering a wide range of policy topics since 1994, from education to health care to criminal justice. OREA’s body of published work chronicles the office’s responsiveness to the varied research and evaluation needs of the General Assembly. OREA reports have led to changes in state law, sparked the creation of state initiatives to address critical needs and informed policy debates within the state legislature and across the state.

The National Legislative Program Evaluation Society has recognized the significant impact (dollar savings, program improvements or increased legislative awareness) of select OREA reports every year since 2002.