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Resource Accessibility and Navigation for the Autism Spectrum Community

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Background

- In 2020, 1 in 35 children who were 8 years old were diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in New Jersey, which makes it the third highest rate of diagnosis across the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network (ADDM)¹.
- Members of the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) community require unique services that differ from one individual to another, such as: Behavioral health, mental health, speech therapy, and many more².
- In the last few years, New Jersey has worked to provide the appropriate resources and support for this growing community within the state. It has done so by providing funding to Autism programs and, as well as establishing The office of Autism³.

1 in 35

Or 2.9% of 8-year-old children in New Jersey were identified with ASD by in 2020.

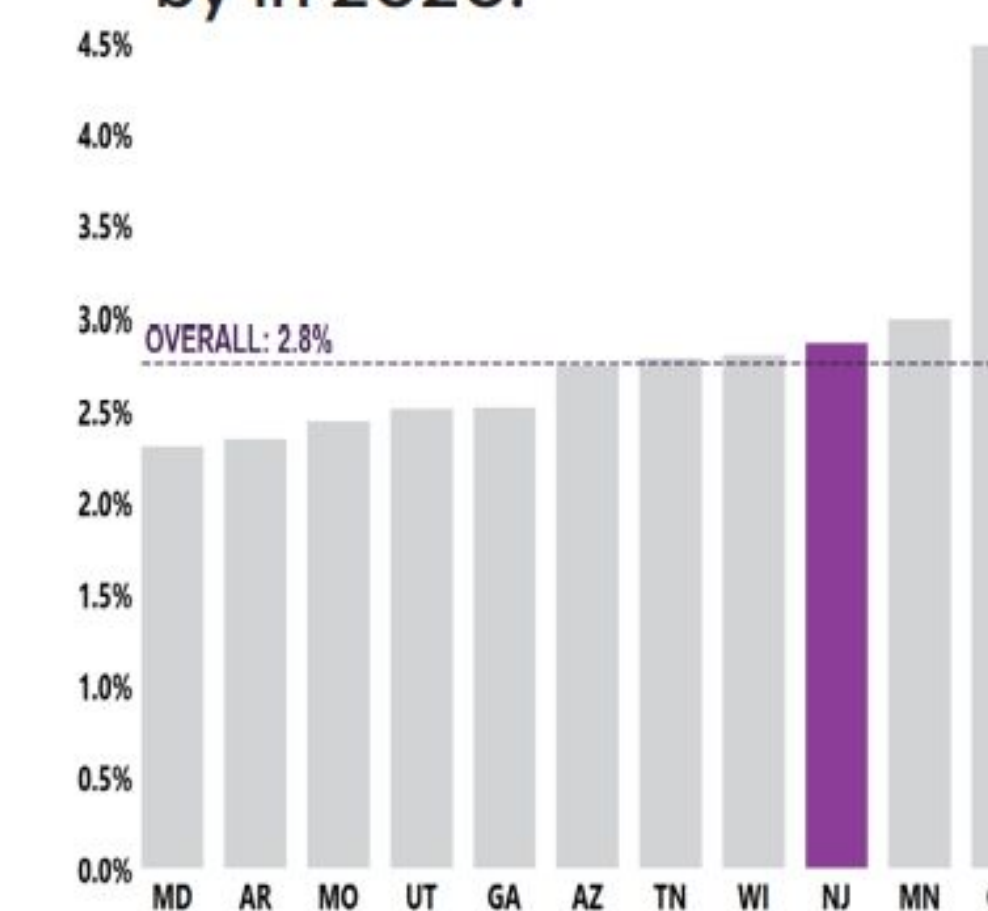


Fig 1. Graph depicting CDC data on percentage of identified ASD 8 year olds in each state in 2020¹.

Conclusion

- Our research into this topic has shown that there is a clear disparity in terms of accessibility to resources for the Autism Spectrum Community in South Jersey. Further research is required to assess the best ways to connect families and assist them in navigating resources that they might need.

Objective

- The goal of our service project is to work with the ASD community in south Jersey to identify what issues they face in regards to resource access.
- We also aimed to find ways to make resource navigation less stressful and to connect families with appropriate support.

Methods

- Databases, such as PubMed, PsychInfo, and government websites, such as the NJ Department of Health were utilized to perform a general search.
- Several interviews were conducted with local physicians, social workers, ASD advocates, and local government employees to gain a better understanding of issue that are specific to ASD community in south Jersey.

Results

Difficulty in acquiring a formal diagnosis

- Formal diagnosis requires finding a specialist and many hours of intensive testing; it also places a financial burden onto the patient or family⁴.

Difficulty in navigating available and relevant resources

- Many families can find themselves overwhelmed by the amount of resources available and find the process of navigating the system difficult and tiresome⁵.

Disparities in available resources to based on age group

- There are a bevy of resources available in NJ for the ASD community, but a significant number are allocated for children under the age of 18. This creates a stressful period of time leading up to the individual's 18th birthday as a multitude of assets become unavailable and the recipient of these resources must undergo significant changes to routine and lifestyle⁶.

The percentage of families who reported some or great effort to access services increased following high school.

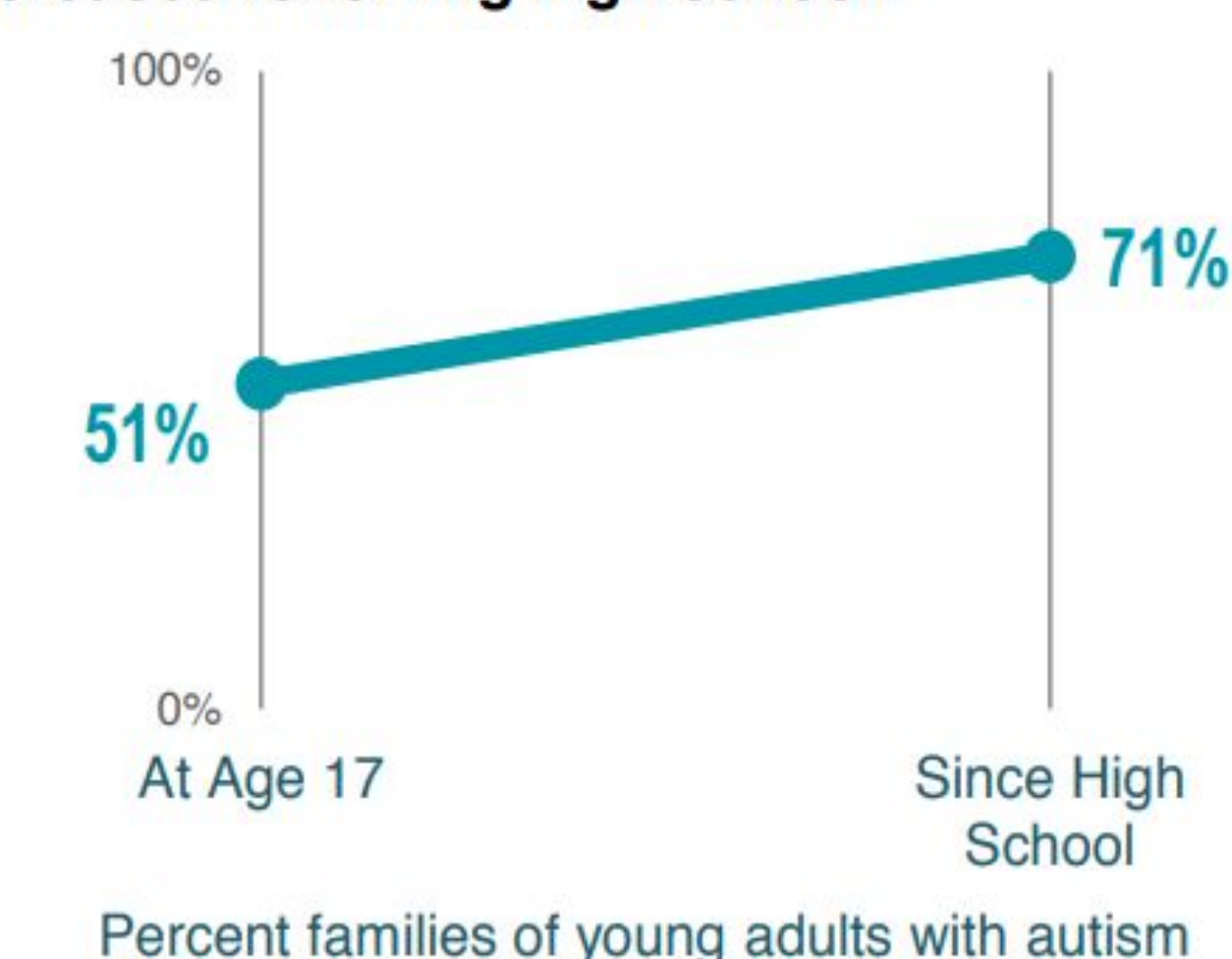


Fig 2. Graph depicting percentage of families who reported some or greater effort required to access services following high school⁶.

Proposed Intervention

- Advertise the use of a database, ResourceNet, which is easily accessible and can locate resources for families within their county.
- Partner with Perform Care system and affiliated organizations which provide in-person assistance to families to assist them through the process of finding resources.
- Aim to spread awareness of these resources within the Rowan-Virtua SOM medical offices through flyers.

References

