

WYOMING DEPARTMENT OF INSURANCE
106 East 6th Avenue, Cheyenne, WY 82002
Contact: Denise Burke (307) 777-2450
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*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

CHEYENNE ----- The Wyoming Department of Insurance was recognized recently as a 2019 Executive Champion by the national organization, Autism Speaks, at their national law summit held in Jackson earlier this month. The award states that it is “in appreciation of exceptional advocacy on behalf of individuals with autism in Wyoming.”

Wyoming Insurance Commissioner Jeff Rude said, “Coverage for treatments related to autism is of critical importance to families in Wyoming. Early intervention contributes to long-term success with this diagnosis and helps families find the coverage they need to help ease some of the stress they face.” Rude commented. “Our former commissioner, our insurance companies, legislators, and all the stakeholders in the autism community helped to make this happen. This award recognizes that collaboration.”

In April 2019, under former Insurance Commissioner Tom Glause, the Department issued a Bulletin to all Wyoming health insurance carriers providing coverage for Autism Spectrum Disorder notifying them that treatments for autism cannot be excluded from an insurance policy that includes mental health coverage. The Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act states that insurance companies cannot make it more difficult to receive mental health or substance abuse treatment than it is to receive medical care. The law also says financial requirements, such as deductibles and co-pays, and treatment limitations, such as the number of visits or days of coverage, cannot be more stringent for mental health and substance abuse treatments than they are for medical care. If an insurance carrier chooses to cover autism and seeks to place limitations on autism treatments or benefits, it must demonstrate that a similar limitation exists with the medical portion of their insurance coverage.

“The journey to meaningful insurance reform for individuals with autism in Wyoming has been long,” Sensational Kids owner and Autism Speaks spokesperson Shelley Szmyd said. “The Department’s work and ultimately the issuance of his bulletin to include applied behavior analysis therapy as a benefit in their plans is life changing for many individuals and families in our state.”

In addition, the Department bulletin notified insurance carriers that they will no longer be allowed to exclude Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy to treat children with autism on the basis that ABA therapy is experimental or investigative treatment.

“The Department surveyed all of the options and determined that like several other western states, it could issue a bulletin that would result in autism coverage as an interpretation of existing federal law,” said Commissioner Rude.

Autism Speaks is an autism advocacy and research organization dedicated to promoting solutions, across the spectrum and throughout the life span, for the needs of individuals with autism and their families through advocacy and support; increasing understanding and acceptance of people with autism spectrum disorder; and advancing research into causes and better interventions for autism spectrum disorder and related conditions. For more information about Autism Speaks, visit autismspeaks.org.

See Bulletin 2019-1 on the Department’s website at: DOI.wyo.gov for the complete autism bulletin issued in April 2019.