

Your View: Letters to the Editor

America not ready for autism onslaught

I write this letter as an uncle of a teenager with autism and as a professional who deals with autism daily. A tidal wave called autism is coming and we are not prepared for it.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in December that the frequency of autism disorders increased by 57 percent in just four years. By the beginning of 2007, one in 110 U.S. children had an autism disorder diagnosed by age 8: one in 70 boys and one in 315 girls.

This new CDC estimate supports other recent prevalence reports. In the CDC study, the average age of diagnosis was 4 1/2 years. Concerning the cause, the lead author for the study, Catherine Rice, Ph.D. said: "At this point, it is hard to say how much is a true increase and how much is improved identification."

Rice believes no single factor or simple explanation can account for the increase.

No matter what the cause or causes, this dramatic increase supports the dire need for the private and public sectors to further address this issue for both cause and treatment.

Our statistics for Pennsylvania also support this effort. The 2005 Pennsylvania Autism Census Project reported in October 2009:

"Pennsylvania will see a dramatic increase in the number of adults with autism in the near future. In 2005, we counted 1,421 adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders who were 21 years of age or older, just 7.1 percent of the total ASD population in Pennsylvania. We estimate that this number will increase by 179 percent to 3,825 in 2010 and by 621 percent to 10,140 by 2015."

As a community, state and nation, we must deal with this tidal wave of children, adolescents and adults with autism. Our goal must be to improve the lives of people with ASDs and pursue basic research into the cause or causes of this increase.

Don't sit on your hands. Join with your neighbors to ask and if needed demand your elected representatives budget the money to deal with this epidemic.

As a new year begins, reach out and give your time, your energy and share your financial resources with a family touched by autism. You will find that the best way to receive is to give.

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