

Health-care disparities exist for children with autism spectrum disorders, researcher says

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Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) require an array of specialized health care services. With these services come higher costs for parents and insurance providers. University of Missouri researchers compared costs and types of services for children with ASD to costs and services for children with other conditions like asthma or diabetes. The researchers found children with ASD paid more for health care than children with other conditions. In addition, children with ASD used more services yet had less access to specialized care.

"Across the board, children with ASD used more [health care services](#), including in-patient stays in the hospital, and required more medications," said Nancy Cheak-Zamora, assistant professor of health sciences in the MU School of Health Professions. "Children's insurance companies paid more for services, and parents also paid more, with their out-of-pocket costs often exceeding a thousand dollars per year."

Cheak-Zamora reviewed previous studies that evaluated how much families of children with ASD paid for health care services. She noticed inequities in the quality and cost of health care for children with ASD compared to children with other specialized care needs.

"Children with ASD need coordinated health care, better access to services and more affordable care," Cheak-Zamora said. "Insurance companies should develop policies that will cover the treatments children with ASD need."

Children with ASD are prone to other conditions, such as seizures, [sleep disturbances](#) and [gastrointestinal problems](#) that can cause them to use health services more frequently. Cheak-Zamora said [health care providers](#) should address all these needs by providing care using the medical home model: primary care that is comprehensive, coordinated and family-centered.

"In general, having a medical home helps ensure you have quality health care. It examines how well your health care providers are giving you coordinated care in which the family is truly a partner," Cheak-Zamora said. "We found that children with ASD have medical homes less often than children with other special health care needs. This is a problem because families without a medical home report experiencing more financial problems and difficulties accessing and utilizing needed medical services."

More information: The article, "A systematic review of disparities in health care for individuals with autism spectrum disorders in the United States," was published in *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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