



*Chapter of the Autism Society of America*

## WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autism is a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life and affects a person's ability to communicate and interact with others. Autism is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is a "spectrum disorder" that affects individuals differently and to varying degrees. There is no known single cause for autism, but increased awareness and funding can help families today.

In February 2007, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued their ADDME autism prevalence report. The report, which looked at a sample of 8 year olds in 2000 and 2002, concluded that the prevalence of autism had risen to 1 in every 150 American children, and almost 1 in 94 boys. The issuance of this report caused a media uproar, but the news was not a surprise to ASA or to the 1.5 million Americans living with the effects of autism spectrum disorder. Nonetheless, the spotlight shown on autism as a result of the prevalence increase opens opportunities for the nation to consider how to serve these families facing a lifetime of supports for their children.

Currently, ASA estimates that the lifetime cost of caring for a child with autism ranges from \$3.5 million to \$5 million, and that the United States is facing almost \$90 billion annually in costs for autism (this figure includes research, insurance costs and non-covered expenses, Medicaid waivers for autism, educational spending, housing, transportation, employment, in addition to related therapeutic services and caregiver costs).

### **Know the Signs: Early Identification Can Change Lives**

Autism is treatable. Children do not "outgrow" autism, but studies show that early diagnosis and intervention lead to significantly improved outcomes.

### **Here are some signs to look for in the children in your life:**

- Lack of or delay in spoken language
- Repetitive use of language and/or motor mannerisms (e.g., hand-flapping, twirling objects)
- Little or no eye contact
- Lack of interest in peer relationships
- Lack of spontaneous or make-believe play
- Persistent fixation on parts of objects