A Snapshot of Autism Spectrum Disorder in Wisconsin

Findings from the Wisconsin Surveillance of Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities System (WISADDS) help us to understand more about the number of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), the characteristics of those children, and the age at which they are first evaluated and diagnosed.

Boys were 3.4 times more likely to be identified with ASD than girls.
White children were more likely to be identified with ASD than black or Hispanic children.

For the first time in 2014, WISADDS, along with all ADDM sites, was able to determine ASD case status under both pre-2013 diagnostic criteria outlined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition (DSM-IV) and the newer DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for ASD.

Among children meeting criteria for ASD under DSM-IV, more than 90% also met criteria for ASD under DSM-5.

1.4% is lower than the average percentage identified with ASD in 2014 1.7% in all ADDM sites

1 in 71 8-year-old children were identified with ASD by WISADDS in 2014

Disparities in Identification

Age of Diagnosis

ASD can be diagnosed as early as 2 years of age.

However, about half of children were not diagnosed with ASD by a community provider until after 4 years, 3 months of age. About 28% of children with ASD had not received a formal diagnosis of ASD by 8 years of age.

Of children identified with ASD...

...about 90% had developmental concerns by 3 years of age.

...but only about 47% received a comprehensive developmental evaluation by 3 years of age.
Frequently Asked Questions

What are the key take-away messages?

• The percentage of children with ASD increased in southeastern Wisconsin from about 1.1 percent in 2012 to about 1.4 percent in 2014.
• Hispanic and black children were less likely to be identified with ASD than white children. This may reflect cultural and/or socioeconomic differences, such as delayed or lack of access to services, as compared to white children in Wisconsin.
• Despite the developmental concerns noted in many of the children's records by 3 years of age, less than half of children identified with ASD received a comprehensive developmental evaluation by this same age. The lag between first concern and first developmental evaluation may affect when children are being diagnosed and connected to the services they need.
• Efforts may be directed toward early developmental screening of all children so those who have ASD can be identified early and connected to the services they need.

How can this information be useful?

WISADDS' latest findings can be used to
• Promote early identification of ASD,
• Plan for ASD services and training,
• Guide future ASD research, and
• Inform policies promoting improved outcomes in health care and education for individuals with ASD.

Stakeholders in Wisconsin might consider different ways to
• Increase awareness of developmental monitoring and empower parents to act if there is a concern about their child's development.
• Lower the age of first evaluation by community providers.
• Increase awareness of ASD among Hispanic and black families, identify and address barriers in order to decrease the age at which all children are evaluated and diagnosed.

How and where was this information collected?

WISADDS uses a record review method. This information is based on the analysis of data collected from the health and education records of children who were 8 years old and living in one of 10 counties in southeastern Wisconsin in 2014.
• Tracking area: Dane, Green, Jefferson, Kenosha, Milwaukee, Ozaucke, Racine, Rock, Walworth, and Waukesha counties
• Children in tracking area: 35,037 8-year-olds
  - 59 percent white
  - 19 percent black
  - 18 percent Hispanic
  - 4 percent Asian or Pacific Islander
  - Less than 1 percent American Indian or Alaska Native

What else does WISADDS do besides tracking ASD among 8-year-olds?

WISADDS collaborates with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services and investigators from the University of Wisconsin-Madison to track the number and characteristics of 8-year-olds with ASD, cerebral palsy, and/or intellectual disability. WISADDS also tracks the number and characteristics of 4-year-olds with ASD. WISADDS facilitates training and provides access to materials related to developmental disabilities for professionals.