

Spotlight On

Closing the Racial and Ethnic Gap in the Identification of Autism Spectrum Disorder

For the first time, the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network data found no overall difference in the number of black children identified with ASD by 8 years of age compared to white children, but ethnic disparities remain.

In past reports, the ADDM Network has consistently found that more white children are identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) than black or Hispanic children. While significant progress has been made in closing the gap in the identification of ASD between populations of white and black children, the number of Hispanic children identified with ASD is still lower compared to white or black children. Previous studies have shown that stigma, lack of access to healthcare services, and non-English primary language are potential barriers to identification of children with ASD, especially among Hispanic children. These barriers mean that certain groups of children may not be getting the services they need to reach their full potential. More work is needed to improve identification of ASD within Hispanic communities.

Differences continue in the age at identification of ASD among black and Hispanic children compared to white children.

Racial and ethnic differences still exist in how early ASD is identified through evaluation and diagnosis, especially when the child with ASD also has intellectual disability. Overall, black and Hispanic children with ASD received evaluations later than white children with ASD.

In addition, black and Hispanic children with ASD and intellectual disability were diagnosed at a later age than white children with ASD and intellectual disability. This delay in diagnosis may limit opportunities to receive services that could improve outcomes and quality of life.



Future directions

Racial and ethnic gaps in the identification of ASD are closing, and targeted community outreach and efforts to have all children screened for ASD are ongoing. The ADDM Network will continue to monitor the number and characteristics of children with ASD to find out if these gaps continue to narrow. This information can help states and communities develop and evaluate strategies to increase awareness and improve identification of ASD and referral to services in black and Hispanic communities.