



# MEDIA RELEASE

STATE OF TENNESSEE  
BUREAU OF TENNCARE

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## **TENNCARE GRANT ENABLES GROUNDBREAKING EFFORT WITH VANDERBILT TO DETECT AUTISM IN TODDLERS** FUNDS AID TNAAP EFFORT TO TRAIN COMMUNITY PEDIATRICIANS

NASHVILLE - A Bureau of TennCare grant to the Tennessee chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (TNAAP) has paved the way to help community-based pediatricians evaluate young children for autism, a highly prevalent developmental condition.

The grant will enable the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center's Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD) to train community pediatricians to assess children suspected of having autism so that they can receive specialized intervention as soon as possible.

"TennCare is pleased to help facilitate a new process to further assess children's development and, if necessary, to get them into early intervention for autism as soon as possible," said TennCare Associate Medical Director Dr. Jeanne Jordan, who also is a pediatrician. "The earlier the diagnosis is suspected or made, the earlier a child can begin needed interventions."

Through this program, which is called Screening Tools and Referral Training - Evaluation and Diagnosis (START ED), TennCare is leading the country's other state Medicaid agencies in addressing the issue of timely autism diagnoses.

"Since 2003, TennCare and TNAAP have partnered to provide office-based screening tools to primary care providers, in order to help them detect the early signs of possible autism," said TNAAP President Dr. Quentin Humberd, a Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrician who also is chief of the Exceptional Family Member Program at Blanchfield Army Community Hospital. "What we determined was that this screening initiative created an increased need for professionals who were able to accurately diagnosis those children with an autism spectrum disorder, and this capability did not exist here or elsewhere in the country."

"We are very excited that the TennCare Bureau allowed this unique collaboration between practicing pediatricians, autism specialists at Vanderbilt and Tennessee's Early Intervention System, to address the very real need to provide early and accurate autism diagnosis right in the child's own community," he said.

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The American Academy of Pediatrics has mandated that children be screened for autism when they are 18 months and 30 months old. While the latest estimates are that one in every 150 children is autistic, there is a scarcity of professionals trained to diagnose autism in young children that often results in lengthy waiting lists. START ED works to increase the number of diagnostic options for parents because time is of the essence.

“The mandates are ahead of our knowledge and resources,” said TRIAD Director Wendy Stone, Ph.D., who also is a Vanderbilt Kennedy Center investigator. “So, we have to catch up ... and the only way to do that is a full-court press.”

Five Middle Tennessee pediatricians will participate in the six-month pilot, which began with a two-day training workshop. Pediatricians will learn how to assess the children and interview their parents to make a diagnostic determination. They will also videotape autism assessments from their own practices to gather feedback.

The grant fueling START ED is part of TennCare’s overall, two-year contract with TNAAP.

TennCare is Tennessee’s managed-care Medicaid program, serving approximately 1.2 million low-income children, pregnant women and disabled Tennesseans, with an annual budget of \$7 billion.

#### EDITOR’S NOTE:

For an interview with Dr. Quentin Humberd, TNAAP president, contact Sarah Bolinger at 270-798-8955.

For an interview with Dr. Wendy Stone, TRIAD director, contact Craig Boerner at 615-343-7421.

For an interview with Dr. Jeanne Jordan, TennCare associate medical director, contact Marilyn Wilson at 615-507-6450.

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