

June 27, 2013

Christie Administration Announces \$4.5 Million In Grants To Advance Autism Research, Treatment and Services

Enhancing the state's commitment to families affected by autism, Health Commissioner Mary E. O'Dowd today joined the Governor's Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Autism to announce \$4.5 million in research grants.

Seven hospitals, universities and medical schools were awarded funds by the Governor's Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Autism for a variety of projects that will develop a new screening tool for culturally diverse families; assess transportation needs; examine biological markers that may help identify autism; and evaluate the influence of risk factors such as environmental pollutants, maternal health status and premature birth on those with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

The grant awards are:

\$2.25 million over 5 years to Children's Specialized Hospital in New Brunswick to develop a new screening tool for culturally diverse families.

\$400,000 over 2 years to UMDNJ New Jersey Medical School to identify biomarkers that would identify a subtype of ASD.

\$399,846 over 2 years to Saint Peter's University Hospital in New Brunswick to examine the biological markers that can be useful in identifying children at risk for autism.

\$399,565 over 2 years to UMDNJ School of Osteopathic Medicine (SOM) in Stratford to examine the association between environmental pollutants and ASD.

\$399,336 over 2 years to UMDNJ New Jersey Medical School to evaluate perinatal risk factors such as parental age, maternal health status, premature birth and their influence on changes in ASD prevalence over time.

\$394,204 over 2 years to Rowan University in Glassboro to compare two interventions for preschool children with autism.

\$321,253 over 2 years to Rutgers University to research the transportation needs of people with ASD and develop policies, procedures and accommodations to improve the quality of life of those on the autism spectrum.

"This new funding furthers Governor Christie's ongoing commitment to support the children and families affected by autism," said Commissioner O'Dowd. "This round of awards focuses both on scientific research as well as developing tools for screening and intervention."

As part of the UMDNJ Restructuring Act, oversight of funding to UMDNJ-New Jersey Medical School will be part of Rutgers University and the award to the UMDNJ School of Osteopathic Medicine will become part of Rowan University.

The grants were announced at the Ben Samuels Children's Center at Montclair State University. The University's Autism Center of Excellence (ACE) coordinates all research funded by the Governor's Council and reports on progress and outcomes of clinical research projects funded by the Council since 2008. The ACE also provides technical assistance, as well as research design and evaluation support to grantees.

Including today's grants, the Governor's Council has awarded \$10.45 million in the last year and nearly \$20 million since 2008.

"The early identification of children with autism spectrum disorder or with developmental delays is critical to get them to the right services that could impact the outcome of their entire lives," said Amy B. Mansue, president and CEO, Children's Specialized Hospital. "The validation of this new autism screening tool may lead to better early identification of young children, especially for culturally diverse families," Mansue said.

"This funding marks a true commitment to high quality research that will help New Jersey families challenged by Autism Spectrum Disorders," said Dr. Caroline Eggerding, chair of the Governor's Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Autism. "In addition we have committed research dollars to fund pilot projects that will explore innovative methods to improve diagnosis and treatment."

Dr. Barbie Zimmerman-Bier, chief of developmental pediatrics at The Children's Hospital at Saint Peter's University Hospital, said its grant will "greatly further the cause of autism research and treatment by helping researchers at Saint Peter's to examine the biological markers that can be useful in identifying children at risk for autism, thereby enabling earlier diagnosis and treatment."

Walter Zahorodny, Ph.D., assistant professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at UMDNJ-New Jersey Medical School, said his study will identify the prenatal risks that contribute to autism. "Identifying these risks may explain the recent rise in autism prevalence detected both in New Jersey and across the country and provide new tools to help prevent autism in the future."

Cecilia Feeley, manager of the Rutgers research project, said she hopes assessment of transportation needs by the University's Center for Advanced Infrastructure and Transportation "will lead to improved quality of life for adults with ASDs."

Professor Mary Louise E. Kerwin at Cooper Medical School of Rowan University, said her study of parent training models for treatment will "empower parents to identify and implement scientifically supported treatments for their children with autism."

For additional information on the Governor's Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Autism, please visit www.state.nj.us/health/autism/index.shtml