



North Dakota Insurance Department

Jon Godfread, Commissioner

Oct. 17, 2018

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Ashley Kelsch
(701) 328-2684
amkelsch@nd.gov

Insurance Commissioner Recognized by Autism Speaks as 2018 Executive Champion

BISMARCK, N.D. – Insurance Commissioner Jon Godfread was recognized as a 2018 Executive Champion by Autism Speaks in appreciation of exceptional advocacy on behalf of individuals with autism in North Dakota earlier this month.

“Coverage for treatments related to autism is of critical importance to families in North Dakota. Early intervention is crucial to long-term success with this diagnosis and helping these families find the coverage they need can go a long way in helping ease some of the stress they face,” Godfread said. “Our insurance companies, legislators and all the stakeholders in the autism community helped to make this happen, so really this award recognizes that collaboration.”

Godfread issued a Bulletin to all North Dakota health insurance carriers providing coverage for Autism Spectrum Disorder in July notifying them that treatments for autism cannot be excluded from an insurance policy. The Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act states that insurance companies cannot make it more difficult to receive mental health or substance abuse treatment than it is to receive medical care. The law also says financial requirements, such as deductibles and co-pays, and treatment limitations, such as the number of visits or days of coverage, cannot be more stringent for mental health and substance abuse treatments than they are for medical care. If an insurance carrier chooses to cover autism and seeks to place limitations on autism treatments or benefits, it must demonstrate that a similar limitation exists with the medical portion of their insurance coverage.

“The journey to meaningful insurance reform for individuals with autism in North Dakota has been long,” North Dakota Autism Center founder Sandy Smith said. “Commissioner Godfread’s work and ultimately the issuance of his bulletin directing North Dakota insurance companies to include applied behavior analysis therapy as a benefit in their plans is life changing for many individuals and families in our state. He is very deserving of this award.”

In addition, Godfread notified insurance carriers in the Bulletin that they will no longer be allowed to exclude Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy to treat children with autism on the basis that ABA therapy is experimental or investigative treatment.

-MORE-

“Autism families reached out to Commissioner Godfread to let him know about their inability to access therapy due to a lack of insurance benefits, and he took action at lightning speed,” Lorri Unumb, Vice President of State Government Affairs for Autism Speaks, said. “Commissioner Godfread surveyed all of the options and determined that his office could issue a bulletin that would result in autism coverage as an interpretation of existing federal law. His decisive actions will literally change the trajectory of the lives of many North Dakotans diagnosed with autism. We applaud his common-sense leadership and were thrilled to be able to present him with the Executive Champion award.”

Autism Speaks is the world’s leading autism advocacy and research organization dedicated to promoting solutions, across the spectrum and throughout the life span, for the needs of individuals with autism and their families through advocacy and support; increasing understanding and acceptance of people with autism spectrum disorder; and advancing research into causes and better interventions for autism spectrum disorder and related conditions. For more information about Autism Speaks, visit autismspeaks.org.

For more information or to read the Bulletin in its entirety, visit nd.gov/ndins.

###

It is the mission of the North Dakota Insurance Department to protect the public good by fairly and effectively administering the laws of North Dakota. We are committed to vigorous consumer protection efforts while fostering a strong, competitive marketplace that provides consumers with choices and access to high-quality insurance products and services at competitive prices. In pursuit of our mission, we will treat all of our constituencies with the highest ethical standards and respect they deserve.