

Assessing Geographic Provider Access by Therapist Type for Children with Autism in Missouri

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Children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) may require specialized therapy or care not as widely available as other forms of care. Our objective was analyzing the distribution of four different types of healthcare services supporting children with ASD throughout the state of Missouri: applied behavior analysts (ABA), occupational therapists (OT), physical therapists (PT), speech language pathologists (SLP), in relation to children with an IEP code for ASD by their local school district, in 2020. Examining the population group with ASD in Missouri in relation to these four therapy types, enables a needs assessment, identifying healthcare gaps. This project is modeled from previous geographic needs assessments done in rural communities around care distribution (Carson et al 2021). An additional layer added to this analysis is the inclusion of multiple therapist types by all counties in Missouri. The count of each therapist by county was identified using the Summarize Within tool in ArcGIS Pro, and then compared to the number of children identified in the county listed having ASD, with the number of hours a child with ASD is recommended to spend with each therapist. While need for a range of services is clearly an issue throughout the state, there is a clear urban-rural divide dependent on the type of service needed. St. Louis, Kansas City, Columbia, and Springfield –population centers in the state –all have adequate numbers of physical and occupational therapists based on recommended PT and OT usage, but this reverses when looking at ABA and speech language pathologists.

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