

Conclusion

Much progress has been made in the autism field since the launch of the first IACC Strategic Plan in 2009. At that time, researchers and other professionals in the field were starting to explore and push toward the possibility of earlier diagnosis and intervention, to understand whether genetics or the environment play a larger role in etiology, to determine why autism was becoming a more common diagnosis, and to understand what were the major challenges of autism in adulthood. Since then, through research and service work in the community, we have learned: that children at risk for ASD can be identified as early as the first year; early intervention does lead to improved outcomes for many children; myriad genetic and environmental factors interact closely resulting in the observed heterogeneity of ASD; multiple factors may be influencing prevalence estimates and that more children with milder forms of ASD are being detected; and that there are tremendous unmet service needs for adults on the autism spectrum. While research and services activities have moved the field forward in many ways, as represented in the aforementioned examples, they have also brought to light many challenges that still need to be addressed.

Before developing the *2016-2017 IACC Strategic Plan for ASD*, the IACC reviewed research progress and analyses of recent data describing the portfolio of ASD research funding in order to assess trends in funding and determine potential areas of opportunity. Overall funding for the autism research portfolio increased, from \$222 million in 2008 to \$343 million in 2015. Over the years the Committee has monitored the research portfolio, it has not identified any concerns about unnecessary duplication of effort across the portfolio, but it has monitored gaps and used this information to inform the development of the *2016-2017 IACC Strategic Plan*.

Strategic investments in the autism portfolio have produced promising scientific advances over recent years. For example, since the last *Strategic Plan Update* in 2013, research findings have provided several new insights, such as a better picture of existing autism services and service needs, improved identification of genetic risk factors for ASD, and a more accurate representation of the broader ASD community – including adolescents, aging adults, and women and girls. This new knowledge has further illuminated several areas ripe for future efforts and investments – investments that have the potential to improve quality of life while also producing long-term cost savings for individuals, families, and society. The 23 new objectives in this update to the *Strategic Plan* describe priorities for autism research, services, and supports that reflect the most important opportunities and needs in the current

autism landscape. Included in these objectives are a focus on detecting autism earlier and improving access to early intervention; advancing understanding the biology of autism and co-occurring conditions across the lifespan; integrating genetic and environmental information to understand autism risk; developing a wide array of new treatments and interventions that will address needs across the spectrum and across the lifespan; implementing interventions in community settings and improving access to services; improving transition services and quality of life for adolescents and adults; and enabling data sharing and expanded surveillance.

The IACC continues to coordinate autism research efforts and reaffirms its commitment to our core values: responding with urgency to the needs and challenges presented by ASD, pursuing excellence in research, building a spirit of collaboration, remaining focused on the needs of consumers, developing strategic partnerships, and striving for equity. As the IACC looks to the future and considers the outlook for its strategic goals, the Committee believes the autism field is poised to experience significant progress toward addressing the critical needs of the autism community in the coming years.