

Breaking Barriers: Autism Transitional Support for Racial and Ethnic Minority Youth

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Abstract

Background: Youth on the autism spectrum face significant barriers in accessing postsecondary education, employment, and independent living. As more autistic youth transition to adulthood, the demand for transitional support has increased. However, existing policies often overlook the challenges faced by autistic youth from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds, leading to poorer health and social outcomes. This DNP/MPH project identified effective public policies that address these barriers, focusing on equity as a key principle in nursing and public health.

Methods: The CDC Policy Analysis and the Racial Equity and Policy (REAP) Frameworks were used to identify policy-driven solutions for addressing barriers to transitional support for racially and ethnically minoritized autistic youth. Using the SMART advocacy framework, an advocacy toolkit was developed to help policymakers and stakeholders address the transitional needs of all youth on the autism spectrum.

Results: The current policy landscape relies on a combination of federal and state transitional support policies that are poorly implemented and fail to address transitional support barriers for autistic racial and ethnic minority youth. This leads to higher unemployment rates, lower enrollment in postsecondary education, and limited opportunities for independent living. Policy recommendations include better implementation of existing policies and scale-up model initiatives for developing and implementing equitable high school curricula or programs focused on supporting all autistic youth as they transition to the postsecondary period.

Conclusion: Policy-based solutions are crucial for providing transitional support to autistic racial and ethnic minority youth, helping them overcome barriers to postsecondary education, employment, and independent living. These initiatives address disparities in support services at the population level rather than at the individual level, which is usually less effective.

Implications: Nursing and public health are well-positioned to advocate for equitable autism transition support programs that enhance health and social outcomes for all autistic youth, enabling them to lead more fulfilling adult lives.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Developmental Disability, Transition to Adulthood, Transition to Adult Care, Postsecondary, Race and Ethnicity, Policy/Program, Disability Justice