

The Autism Program at Boston Medical Center

# ANNUAL



Artwork by  
Jayden

# REPORT 2025

**BOSTON  
MEDICAL**  
CENTER

The Autism Program

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# A Letter From Our Leadership

As we reflect on the past year, we are filled with deep pride and gratitude for the opportunity to serve individuals with autism and their families. Our mission remains rooted in creating a welcoming, compassionate environment where every person receives the care, respect, and support they deserve. In 2025, we continued to strengthen that commitment by expanding services, deepening community partnerships, and broadening our reach to support individuals with autism across the lifespan.

A major focus this year was expanding programming across the age spectrum. In addition to our pediatric services, we launched an Adult Living Skills class at the SPARK Center at Boston Medical Center, providing practical, community-based instruction to support independence and daily functioning for autistic adults. This initiative reflects our ongoing effort to address the growing need for services that support individuals well beyond childhood.

Families remain at the center of our work. Over the past year, we developed and shared an expanded collection of resources to help families navigate diagnosis, services, and everyday life with autism. These resources—available in multiple languages—serve as practical tools and sources of connection for families seeking guidance and support.

We also significantly expanded our training and consultation efforts. Our team engaged with professionals and organizations across the country and internationally, sharing expertise and helping to strengthen autism-informed practices in diverse settings. This included new consultative partnerships with The Brien Center in Western Massachusetts and the University of Michigan, as well as a growing number of educational engagements with clinicians, educators, and service providers around the world.

One of the highlights of the year was our A/D Program Conference, Autism Acceptance into Action, which continues to be a highly anticipated gathering for both professionals and families. The conference brought together a vibrant community of clinicians, researchers, advocates, and caregivers to share knowledge, foster collaboration, and highlight innovative approaches to supporting individuals with autism.

As our program grows, so does our commitment to ensuring that individuals with autism—and the families who support them—have access to compassionate, evidence-based care and meaningful opportunities for connection and growth. We are deeply grateful for the trust our patients and families place in us, and for the dedication of our staff and partners who make this work possible.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to building on this progress—expanding services, strengthening partnerships, and continuing to create a future in which all individuals with autism are supported, understood, and empowered to thrive.

Thank you for your continued partnership and support.



**Shari Krauss,  
Program Director**



**Alex Friedman,  
Program Manager**

# OUR TEAM

*Our work is built on relationships. Each member of our team brings a distinct lens, united by the belief that healthcare should feel safe, respectful, and human.*



**Shari Krauss**  
Program Director



**Alex Friedman**  
Program Manager



**Liz Ferriero**  
Program Co-lead



**Hillary Hollis**  
Program Co-lead



**Jacqueline McKendry**  
Behavior Specialist



**Juju Ha**  
Autism Resource Specialist



**Katie Shields**  
Adult Autism Resource Specialist



**Christina Chow**  
Autism Resource Specialist

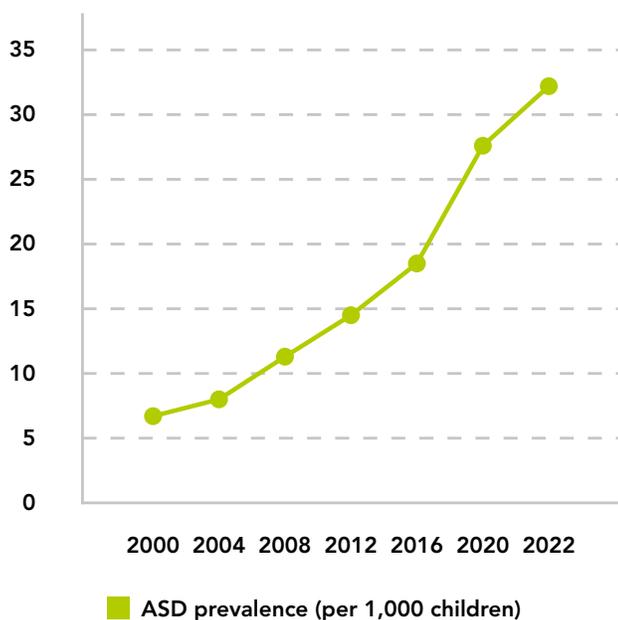


**Katie Bristol**  
Transition Specialist

# Autism Spectrum Disorder:

## TODAY'S LANDSCAPE

For many families, autism care begins with uncertainty. Diagnosis can be overwhelming, services can be difficult to access, and healthcare spaces often feel unprepared. These realities, well-supported by evidence and research, shape the core of our work.



Data and Statistics on Autism Spectrum Disorder, CDC's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network

A recent CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) study shows that autism diagnoses among eight-year-old children have **risen from 1 in 36 (2.78%) to 1 in 31 (3.2%)**<sup>1</sup>, continuing a nationwide upward trend. For the first time, **higher rates of autism** were identified among Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American/Alaska Native,

Black, Hispanic, and multicultural children<sup>1</sup>, reflecting broader access to diagnostic services and growing awareness across communities.

Gender representation in ASD diagnosis is also shifting. **The diagnostic ratio of boys to girls has narrowed**<sup>2</sup> from 4:1 to 3.4:1, highlighting improving recognition of autism in girls and gender diverse approaches to diagnosis and care. Yet this remains an important area of focus, as delayed identification can lead to significant long-term challenges.



At the same time, a national AHRQ (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality) analysis found that **healthcare and support costs for children with autism are nearly 10 times higher**<sup>3</sup> than for children without ASD. Financial stress is one of many domains of challenges that families experience, underscoring how essential it is to **bolster caregiver supports**—which research shows directly enhances the quality of life of caregivers.

**The needs of autistic individuals and their families are both diverse and clear.** Guided by the voices of our patients and caregivers, the Autism Program is committed to bridging gaps in essential services, strengthening community supports, and advancing ASD awareness. We continue to evolve to meet the needs of families across Massachusetts and to build a care network rooted in equity, compassion, and possibility.

<sup>1</sup>Center for Disease Control and Prevention

<sup>2</sup>Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

<sup>3</sup>Samuel, P.S., Marsack-Topolewski, C.N., & Chan, K.T. (2025). *Quality of Life of Family Caregivers of Adults with Autism: Role of Caregiver Burden, Health, and Social Support of Compound and Noncompound Caregivers*

# WHAT WE DO



Since its establishment in 2007, the Autism Program at Boston Medical Center has remained dedicated to supporting and empowering autistic individuals and their families through direct patient support, provider education, and community-based outreach. We are committed to meeting the diverse needs of our patients in a culturally competent manner and offering high quality, comprehensive care to all those we serve.

## AUTISM FRIENDLY INITIATIVE

### DIRECT PATIENT CARE

- **General autism resource support** for pediatric patients
- **Support across the lifespan:** Transition into adulthood and Adult support
- **Hospital-wide** procedure support

- **Individualize** patient care
- **Modify** sensory environment
- **Train** clinicians, staff, students
- **Provide** visit preparation

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & EMPOWERMENT

- **TEAM** (*Teens Engaged as Mentors*)
- **ALS** (*Adult Living Skills Class*)
- **Internship & Volunteer** placement
- **Partnership** with local schools & community organizations

Bridging gaps between systems, languages, and experiences.

**INDIRECT DIRECT**

**PATIENT CARE PATIENT CARE**

**INDIRECT DIRECT**

**PATIENT CARE PATIENT CARE**

**INDIRECT DIRECT**

**PATIENT CARE PATIENT CARE**

2,558

Referrals for  
Pediatric  
Patients

312

Referrals for  
Transition to  
Adulthood

120

Referrals for  
Adult Services  
& Support

279

Referrals for  
Hospital Wide  
Support

3,269

Total Patient  
Encounters in  
2025

“

Working with them [the Autism Program] has been very wonderful. They have given me a lot of information that I didn't know about before. **I didn't know how easy it was.**

I'm so happy about the support, so very happy, because she [my daughter] had to have heart checkups, ultrasounds, and many other things, and **it was difficult...** because they had to sedate her. **But not anymore,** thank God.

**Thank you for always supporting all families,** both neurodivergent and non neurodivergent families... Checking on another, sharing tips and supporting parents, going out for coffees and helping with meetings... **We would not have this without you.**

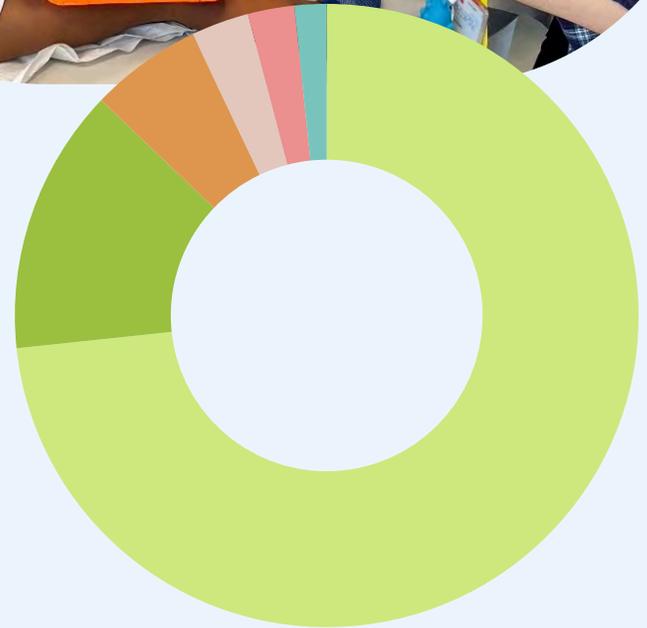
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# TOWARDS PATIENT CENTERED HEALTHCARE EXPERIENCES

In 2025, the Autism Program delivered support on more than **3,000 occasions**. Our team served pediatric, transition-age, and adult patients in over **13 languages**, including American Sign Language, Portuguese, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Chinese, Somali, and others. Referral reasons spanned the **full continuum of care** from new diagnosis to adulthood, reflecting the diverse spectrum of needs within the community we serve.

Our Hospital-wide support has reached a new milestone in 2025, with the number of patients served **increasing by 117%** compared to 2024. This growth reflects our growing capacity to meet the needs of autistic patients and clinicians across Boston Medical Center.

We supported a broad range of procedures throughout the year, such as blood draws, injections and vaccinations, dental care, imaging (x-rays, EKG, Echo), swallow studies, surgeries, and others. This comprehensive reach is a vivid demonstration of our **commitment to reducing barriers and ensuring safe, and patient centered experiences across the entire hospital.**



- Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics (1858)
- Primary Care (350)
- Feeding Clinic (147)
- Neurology (76)
- Comprehensive Care Program (61)
- Psychiatry (42)

**BMC**  
Departments  
who requested  
Hospital wide  
support in 2025

# ACROSS

# THE

# L I F E S P A N

## AGE 14 THROUGH 21

Our **Transition Specialist** plays a critical role in supporting autistic adolescents and their families as they navigate the complex shift into adulthood. We provide guidance across multiple systems, including education, healthcare, legal services, and community-based supports, ensuring that families are equipped with the information and resources necessary for a successful transition.

## AGE 22 & BEYOND

Our **Adult Autism Resource Specialist** delivers much needed support to autistic adults who are navigating a myriad of systems and processes of adulthood. Key areas of support include adult diagnosis pathways, connection with state agencies & government benefit programs, supported decision making, and employment. By continuing our care across the lifespan, we ensure that adults receive coordinated and informed assistance that promotes independence and equity.

# SETTINGS

# &



Our **Behavior Consultation Clinic** (BCC) provides virtual behavior analytic consultations at no cost for families without in-home ABA support. Our Behavior Specialist assesses challenging behaviors and equips families with practical and individualized strategies.



We offer **hospital-wide** support for pediatric & adult autistic patients, their families, and care teams to help ensure that medical visits and procedures go as smooth and autism-friendly as possible.



I saw a complete change...  
Now, when I tell her [*my daughter*] that we are going to an appointment, she goes... The appointment is no longer a trauma for her, but a game.



## THREE CASE EXAMPLES



**7-year-old with nonverbal autism** admitted with approximately two weeks of refusal to eat, found to have significant dental disease requiring the extraction of multiple teeth in the [Operation Room]. Following this intervention, the patient continued to refuse to eat or drink anything and was also unable to tolerate IV placement (was restrained for placement and would pull out the IV immediately following). This situation was very frustrating for the parent and for our team, as it felt as though we were truly stuck. Jacqueline McKendry worked with the mother and our nursing staff to identify this patient's likes and dislikes, flagging specific key details that we would otherwise not have thought to ask about (color of juice, temperature of liquids, type of cup). Using this information, we were ultimately successful in encouraging the patient to take pain medications, drink liquids, and take some solids. Absent Jacqueline's input I am honestly unsure how we would have been able to move care forward or even discharge the patient. As importantly, we were able to avoid further healthcare-related trauma for this patient that would only have heightened his fear with any subsequent encounters. Jacqueline also put a note in the patient's chart describing his likes/dislikes to serve as a resource for future providers in any clinical setting (ED, dental clinic, primary care).

**18-year-old with autism spectrum disorder**, developmental delay, and functional neurologic disorder admitted with refusal to eat due to sensation that food was sticking in her throat. Given concern that she might in fact have esophagitis or a vocal cord abnormality, performing a bedside laryngoscopy was a key step in her workup. However, the patient refused to undergo the procedure several times despite coaching from SLP and nursing, and would hit out at staff when they attempted to initiate the procedure. Jacqueline suggested that we try talking the patient through what to expect at each stage of the procedure, using words, pictures, and physical stimuli. She created a social story for this patient that showed each stage of the process (as a picture) on a single sheet of paper. Before the procedure, she showed each picture to the patient and allowed her to ask questions. During the procedure itself, Jacqueline held up the pictures, asking the patient's permission to drop each piece of paper as a step was completed and allowing the patient to feel that she was in control of the process. As a result, we were able to move care forward and avoid further trauma for this patient and her mother, who had already had multiple very difficult experiences in the healthcare system.

**23-year-old with nonverbal autism** and refractory epilepsy who was admitted for seizure monitoring. In talking with the neurology team and the parent, it became clear that the family had never received guidance about transitioning to adult care or the need to designate a legal guardian. Jacqueline provided the mother—who was quite elderly—with informational resources about guardianship and a conservator and followed up with the family after discharge to make sure that the family moved forward with next steps. This intervention was a key steps for this patient, as he otherwise did not have a person with the legal authority to make decisions for him, whether in consenting to medical care or in managing his finances.



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## EQUITABLE & COMPASSIONATE CARE



The work that your team does is incredibly valuable across the hospital. The support provided by the Autism Program plays a **critical role in promoting both the safety and overall well-being of autistic patients during medical encounters**. Many of our patients experience heightened anxiety or sensory sensitivities in healthcare environments, and having access to your team's expertise allows us to better understand individual needs and implement strategies that help patients feel more regulated and supported.

Your team's guidance around **behavioral supports, proactive planning, and patient-centered approaches** has made a meaningful difference in helping staff provide safer and more effective care. These interventions not only reduce distress for patients but also help prevent escalation, creating a more positive and successful experience for both patients and providers.

The presence of a dedicated team with expertise in autism ensures that our hospital can deliver equitable, compassionate care to this patient population. **Continuing this work is essential to maintaining an environment where autistic patients feel understood, supported, and safe during their healthcare experiences.**

### THIS RESOURCE IS **CRITICAL** FOR OUR PEDIATRIC SPECIALTY TEAMS.

We have created coordinated lab draws so children have EXCELLENT experiences. **We are not adding to medical trauma.** They are not afraid and leave feeling empowered. This is a collaborative effort where the provider orders labs. Autism team and nursing work with the family to set up date and time so the client does not have to wait that adds to unnecessary anxiety of the child. Customized communication boards. Pain relief. Expert lab team. Yields parents saying "they have **never had such a positive experience**" and are hugging us when they leave. The child leaves smiling and feeling really proud of themselves.

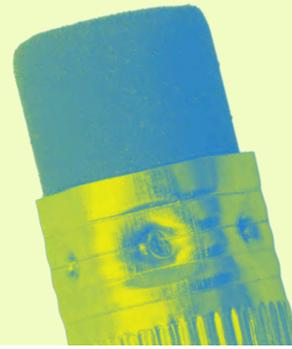
### APPROPRIATE CARE, **LIKE ANY OTHER FAMILY**

I can easily say that without the help of the autism team many procedures and needed care would not have happened, such as labs, allergy testing, and blood draws, etc. The autism team is amazing and **helps not only patient but provides reassurance to families** that their child WILL get the appropriate care they need and get treated like "any other child." I have been told by many families that they love it here at BMC as their child gets treated "normal", something they sadly often don't experience.

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# RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT



## Information is a powerful tool for empowerment.

Throughout the year, our team has remain dedicated to translating complex systems into clear, actionable guidance that encourages families and patients to make informed decisions with confidence. We engage with the voices of the families and providers we serve, ensuring that our resources reflect real and current support needs.

This year, we expanded on guides that address blood draw and vaccination strategies, autism-friendly summer programs, emotional support animals, children's books, food security, and others. We also amplified voices within our community by publishing interviews exploring critical topics such as gender disparities in ASD diagnosis, the transition into college and adulthood, sibling perspectives, and the importance of community and self-advocacy. All program materials continue to be available at no cost through our website.

### Find food near you

Below, you will find a list of food resource guides and online maps for different MA regions. With each resource, you can search by your town/zip code to locate the closest food pantry, soup kitchen, and other food programs to you.

**Greater Boston**

**Food Resource Guide**, updated monthly and available in Spanish, Kreyól Atyeyen, Tiếng Việt, and Kriolu Kabuverdianu.

**Food Assistance Finder**, an online map where you can search by address to find the closest resource to you.

**Northeast MA**

**Food Resource Guide**, last updated October 2025 that provide helpful food assistance pr with town and contact info

**Merrimack Valley Food E** online map tool to search pantries and meal program area along with their scho

**Southeast MA**

**South Shore Food Bank**, directory of food pantries across Brockton, Quincy, Inland South, and coastal South shore.

**South Shore Community Action Council**, an online map where you can search by town to find food pantries and meal programs.

**Central MA**

**Worcester County Food Finder**, an online map tool you can search by your ar find closest food resource

**Cape Cod & Islands**

**Food Resource Guide**, last updated October 2025 that includes a list of food resources around Cape Cod & the Islands.

**Cape Cod Council of Churches**, community organization that offers soup kitchen and food pantry in central Cape Cod.

### DAY CAMPS

**Disclaimer:** We know camps can be expensive! If you're in need of financial assistance, please try:

- Contacting the camp directly
- Asking your doctor
- Contacting DDS
- Reaching out to local organizations

**The sooner you reach out, the more likely you are to receive aid!**

**#1**

**CAMP JOY** [Click me!](#)

Boston, MA | Roberta.5mails@boston.gov | 617-961-6952

July 14 - August 8 (one four-week session)	8 am-2 pm	\$275* total
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\* financial aid may be available from BMC but payment cannot be through an agency check or else fee is \$350

**Ages 3-15.** Created by the Boston Center for Youth & Families (BCYF), **Camp Joy** is for Boston residents with disabilities and their siblings (ages 3-7). A summer at this camp offers a variety of enrichment activities designed to: promote peer-to-peer socialization, foster relationship building, and support individual growth. They provide 4:1 child to staff ratio, breakfast/lunch and door-to-door transportation for Boston families!

**#2**

**CAMP RAINBOW**

Cambridge, MA | CampRainbow@cambridgema.gov | 617-349-6229

July 8 - August 16 (one-week sessions)	Full-day sessions (9 am - 3 pm)	\$50*/week
	Half-day sessions (12:30-3 pm)	\$50*/week

\*2024 summer prices

**Ages 6-22.** **Camp Rainbow** is an annual summer camp serving Cambridge young people with disabilities. Participants enjoy a variety of experiences, including outdoor activities, swimming, arts & crafts, and cooking. Camp Rainbow takes field trips to local attractions (mini golf, bowling, zoos, farms, and more) every Wednesday of camp sessions.

### Is a Service Animal right for me?

If you or your child likes dogs and has a disability for which a service animal may help, then they can be great companions that help the child navigate life. There are many organizations that can help match families with service animals. For more information specific to each organization, be sure to visit their website and read more about each of their application eligibility and process.

### Service Animal Costs

enance costs (food, vet, etc.) for service animals: **\$2,000** for dogs, with unials estimated around **\$1000**

The IRS allows you to **claim** service dogs on your **taxes**, including dog purchase, maintenance (food, veterinary care, and grooming), and training costs.

- Timeline:** 18-24 months + wait list
- Price:** No cost except maintenance, encourages "pay-it-forward" system to assist other families
- Eligibility:** Children 4 to 12 years old
- Helps with:** Autism + hearing loss, seizures, physical disabilities

Website

Application

- Timeline:** 6 to 24 months + wait list
- Price:** No cost except maintenance
- Eligibility:** Children must be between the ages of 5 and 11
- Helps with:** Autism

Website

Application

Food Resources Guide

Summer Guide

Emotional Support Animal Guide



Connection changes everything.  
Shared experiences, sense of  
belonging, confidence, and  
freedom to be yourself.

COMMUNITY COMMUNITY  
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# ADULT LIVING SKILLS CLASS



## Promoting independence, confidence & friendship

In 2025, the Autism Program launched the Adult Living Skills (ALS) class series to meet the increasing demand for culinary skill development among autistic young adults. Led by the program's Adult Autism Resource Specialist and Transition Specialists, the series was created to enhance students' understanding of kitchen safety and promote healthy autonomy in their own meal preparation.



Over the five-week series, each session focused on a distinct kitchen or cooking skill paired with a meal, providing structured and hands-on opportunities for students to build practical daily living skills. All students completed the full series with meaningful gains in their comfort and confidence in the kitchen as well as with their friendships fostered during class.



The curriculum incorporated visual recipes, step-by-step demonstrations, and multiple modes of instruction to support diverse learning styles. Each class offered students both guided practice and independent cooking opportunities.

“

*[Since the class, my son] has been wanting to cook and do more. He had an opportunity to explore different foods and make his own. Now he has a wider range of things he can eat.*

”

Week	Kitchen Skill	Activity	Cooking Skill
1	Kitchen Safety and Hygiene	Practice hand washing, cleaning workstation	Making a sandwich
2	Balanced Plate and Cooking with Heat	Creating a balanced plate	Scrambled eggs with sauteed vegetables and toast
3	Meal Planning and Thinking Ahead	Practice checking the pantry and refrigerator before grocery shopping, creating individualized visuals, making grocery list of needed items	Overnight oats
4	Expiration Dates, Food Storage, Seasoning, Homemade Snacks	How to examine expiration dates, organizing refrigerator by food groups, different storing techniques before and after use	Ranch dip
5	Following a Recipe	Reading and following recipe independently	Personal pizza

In 2025, Autism Program continued our novel mentoring program that pairs teens with & without ASD to mentor younger children on the spectrum. This integrated teen mentoring program encourages **empowerment, strong leadership, self-confidence**, and positive community relationships within all participants through monthly social events.

# TEENS ENGAGED AS MENTORS

Creating safe space, community connection, and leadership



[In TEAM], you can see young individuals walk away with that new sense of confidence and feeling like they can take on new challenges.



What I have enjoyed most about it [TEAM] was that it has given me a chance to become someone who can be a leader.



There is a lot of possibility out there if we are true to ourselves... We just have to keep going and always understand that autism is something that can never be little.



# 2025 BY THE NUMBERS

This year marked the largest TEAM cohort yet, with **13 new participants**. Through exciting social events hosted throughout the city each month, TEAM continues to promote **positive community engagement** and **rich personal growth**. Events from 2025 have included visiting LEGO Discovery Center, Weir River Farm, volunteering at various community organizations, and others.



**15**  
Mentees



**15**  
Mentors



**19**  
Facilitators



Students arrive curious, leave transformed—  
Carrying forward a vision of empathetic healthcare.

# INTERNSHIP & VOLUNTEER PLACEMENT

**50**  
Interns in  
2025

**21**  
Colleges &  
Universities

The internship and volunteer placement with the Autism Program at BMC provides undergraduate and graduate level students the opportunity to participate in a rich applied hospital based placement supporting children and families. The program relies heavily on the support, creativity, and drive of student interns and volunteers in various capacities based on the program and individual student's needs. The student intern or volunteer works with BMC Autism Program staff in executing many aspects and components of our work, such as general programmatic operations, the Autism Friendly Initiative, resource & family support, research, and TEAM.



We help systems see what patients feel. Lower lights, clearer explanations, individualized preparation, and patience can change an entire experience.

**FRIENDLY AUTISM FRIENDLY  
TIVE INITIATIVE**

**FRIENDLY AUTISM FRIENDLY  
TIVE INITIATIVE**

**FRIENDLY AUTISM FRIENDLY  
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# Autism Friendly Initiative

## 2025 OVERVIEW



Research continues to highlight significant gaps in the healthcare experience for autistic individuals. More than half (53%) report difficulty communicating with their doctors about their health, and 51% struggle with traditional waiting room environments<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, 40% of general practitioners report no formal training in autism<sup>2</sup>.

These findings underscore a critical need for continued advocacy, education, and systemic reform. Advancing autism-friendly healthcare practices is essential not only to improve individual patient experiences but also to drive lasting, equitable change across the healthcare system, and the Autism Program remains dedicated to utilizing our evidence-based model of care—guided by the following principles—to support this mission.

<sup>1</sup>Doherty M., Neilson S., O'Sullivan J., et al. *Barriers to healthcare and self-reported adverse outcomes for autistic adults: a cross-sectional study.* (2021)

<sup>2</sup>Unigwe S., Buckley C., Crane L., et al. *GPs' confidence in caring for their patients on the autism spectrum: an online self-report study.* (2017)



### INDIVIDUALIZED CARE

1,100 Autism Support Checklists gathered collecting patient specific information to ensure respectful, comfortable care.

### SENSORY ACCOMMODATIONS

900 Sensory Tool Packs distributed in 2025 to various departments across BMC to assist with sensory regulation throughout visits.

### VISIT PREPARATIONS

Healthcare Social Stories available in 8 languages to prepare patients for medical procedures as well as providing in-person support during procedures.

### TRAINING & EDUCATION

Provided ASD training to BMC staff across departments, including Public Safety, Ophthalmology, and others.

# Healthcare Education: BMC & Beyond

## Autism Acceptance into Action: Crafting an Inclusive World



Additionally, we continued to advance our autism-friendly education initiatives across BMC and beyond. This year, we launched a new **“Disability Etiquette Among Colleagues”** training for BMCHS, strengthening respect, inclusion, and advocacy in care delivery. We also provided trainings for the **University of Michigan and Michigan Medicine, the Brien Center,** and continued our ongoing education series with the **Department of Children and Families, Boston University’s Dental School,** and others.

In 2025, the Autism Program hosted a full-day virtual conference designed to advance learning, strengthen collaboration, and foster community among an international audience. Participants represented a broad range of institutions, including BMC, Massachusetts state agencies such as DDS (Department of Developmental Services), DPH (Department of Public Health), and DCF (Department of Children and Families), as well as schools, universities, and organizations across the country and abroad.

We discussed strategies for promoting medical desensitization, the importance of self-advocacy and community, how to create individualized resources, facilitate efficient communication between schools and medical teams, develop autism-friendly community programs, and common feeding challenges in autistic children. We are grateful for the opportunity to bring communities together in service of expanding knowledge, strengthening support systems, and advancing autism-friendly healthcare practices.



Through this presentation and engagement with the program, our students gain a broader understanding of the way in which a hospital system has advocated for change to ensure patients are well taken care of, and that their individual needs can be addressed.



# Healthcare Education: BMC & Beyond

## Interdisciplinary Collaboration Highlights

### Driving meaningful change through an autism-friendly lens



**Jacqueline McKendry**, Behavior Specialist, serves as a council member of the **PAIN Council at Boston Medical Center**, a multidisciplinary initiative focused on advancing compassionate, trauma-informed, and developmentally responsive pediatric care in ambulatory settings. Drawing on more than a decade of experience supporting autistic individuals, Jacqueline brings a neuro-affirming, behavior-analytic perspective to strengthen pain management practices. Her contributions elevate autism-friendly approaches to potentially distressing procedures such as blood draws, vaccinations, and surgeries through providing staff education on effective, patient-centered support strategies for autistic patients—benefiting the PAIN Council and broader clinical teams across the hospital.

### Disability Etiquette, Shared Voices, Real Impact.

In 2025, the Autism Program partnered with Boston Medical Center's Accessibility Committee and the Section of General Internal Medicine to facilitate a **"Disability Etiquette Among Colleagues"** training to support hospital staff in recognizing norms and best practices for interacting with coworkers with various disabilities. This training included the voices of panelists with various lived experiences and had over 100 attendees.

### Meeting This Moment Together

The BMC Autism Program, in partnership with the **Massachusetts Disability Task Force** held **"Meeting This Moment Together"**—a conference that convened disability service providers, advocates, and funders for a meaningful day of learning and dialogue. Program sessions addressed current legal and policy developments, strategies to support vulnerable populations, and how we can strengthen our ability to serve people with disabilities, their families, and other professionals. The conference reinforced a **shared commitment to collaboration and action**, equipping participants with the knowledge and partnerships to help meet this moment together.

### Shaping better medical care for neurodivergent children worldwide.



The Autism Program was invited to partner with the **University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia** on a research study to understand how to **best support neurodivergent children during medical procedures**. This research was recently published in [Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review](#).



## FOUNDATION OF KNOWLEDGE



With BMC serving a diverse community, many of the individuals who come through our campus live with autism spectrum disorder. Because our public safety officers interact with, patients, visitors, and family members in moments that can often be stressful or overwhelming, **it is critical that the officers understand how autism may affect communication, behavior and sensory response.**

The autism awareness training that is provided to our new hire public safety officers has been **extremely valuable.** While some officers have had firsthand experience interacting with individuals with autism, the training ensures that all new hire public safety officers have a foundation of knowledge to help them recognize common characteristics of autism and techniques that they can be used to try to **de-escalate situations more effectively.** Expanding autism awareness services across BMC Health Systems is important in helping ensure that individuals on the spectrum are treated with understanding, dignity, and care throughout the campuses. I am grateful to be able to have them speak to all our new hires.

## UNIQUE NEEDS, UNIQUE EDUCATION

[The Autism Program] has partnered closely with our staff to improve the care experience for these patients. They have provided sensory tools and materials specifically designed to support this population, while also offering invaluable education and on-site support for nurses caring for these patients.

Their willingness to collaborate with our team has fostered a strong culture of teamwork and dedication to meeting the unique needs of this patient population. Through their expertise, compassion, and advocacy, they have helped our staff better understand how to provide thoughtful, individualized care to patients with ASD. For a population that requires additional patience, flexibility, and understanding, their **commitment to supporting both patients and staff demonstrates what it truly means to provide respectful and inclusive care for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.**

## EXCEPTIONAL CARE **WITHOUT** EXCEPTION

Through the efforts of the Autism Program, BMC launched its Autism Friendly Initiative and created the Autism Toolkit that has been made available in various parts of the hospital. Members of the Autism Program have also created and been involved in various trainings that are **essential for our frontline providers** to understand the intricacies and sensitivities of engaging with autistic patients. The Autism Program has been an important part of patient centered care delivery for over a decade and in that time has made BMC a more accessible place for this complex patient population.



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# DONORS

The Autism Program is grateful for our donors who make our work for the autism community in Massachusetts possible.

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2025 Boston Common's Holiday Gala

## STAY IN TOUCH!



[www.bmc.org/autism](http://www.bmc.org/autism)  
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*Exceptional  
care without  
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