

2026 Snapshot: Access, Capacity, and Community Impact – Autism Programs, UNM Center for Development & Disability

Autism Diagnostic Services & NM START

AUTISM DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

- More than **300 autism evaluations** were completed during the past year.
- Diagnostic capacity expanded through increased psychology faculty, psychology trainees, and interdisciplinary workforce development.
- Due to growing demand, the autism diagnostic waitlist reopened in **Summer 2026**.
- The program is currently operating under a **capacity-based referral model**, with referral windows opened based on available evaluation capacity; this allows us to continue to see new clients and individuals are waiting 2-3 months.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & CAPACITY BUILDING

New Mexico continues to expand autism expertise through training and community partnerships.

- Ongoing training of **Primary Care Providers and community providers through Project ECHO programs** focused on autism identification, diagnosis, and evidence-based care.
- Monthly **Clinical Education Team (CET)** trainings reached **600+ participants statewide**.
- **41 additional community training activities** were delivered to providers, educators, and community organizations.
- **24 community linkage agreements** support coordination among healthcare, behavioral health, education, and developmental disability systems.

NM START – Crisis Prevention & Intervention for ASD/IDD and mental health concerns

Who Was Served

- **82 individuals served (within a 2 hour radius of Albuquerque)**
 - **55 children**
 - **27 adults**
- **87% of children** served had Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).
- **89% of adults** served had Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).
- **5% of children served** were living in alternative family living or foster care settings.

Most Common Referral Reasons

- Aggression and severe behavioral challenges
- Family and caregiver support needs

- Complex mental health concerns
- Risk of crisis, hospitalization, or placement disruption

Clinical Complexity

Compared to national START program populations, New Mexico served a higher proportion of individuals with:

- Anxiety disorders
- Depression
- Trauma- and stress-related disorders

Additional findings:

- **40% of participants reported inconsistent access to at least one needed healthcare provider.**

Crisis Prevention & Community Stability

- **NM START responded to 22 crisis contacts** for children.
- **48 crisis contacts** were provided for adults.
- **80% of crisis contacts resulted in individuals maintaining their community setting.**

Program Outcomes for NM START participants:

- Emergency service utilization decreased by **22 percentage points**.
- Psychiatric hospitalization decreased by **23 percentage points**.
- Law enforcement involvement decreased by **11 percentage points**.

Therapeutic Coaching

- **35 individuals received therapeutic coaching services.**
- **496 hours of therapeutic coaching** were delivered to support skill development, family stability, and crisis prevention.

SUMMARY

New Mexico's autism service system continues to grow through expanded diagnostic services, provider training, workforce development, and specialized community-based supports. Data from the past year demonstrate increasing demand for autism evaluations, ongoing efforts to build statewide provider capacity, and positive outcomes associated with NM START's crisis prevention and intervention services, including reduced emergency service utilization, reduced psychiatric hospitalization, and increased community stability for individuals with autism and related developmental disabilities.

