

ABSTRACT

Improved Identification of Autism Among Latino Children.

Early diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders leads to more expeditious behavioral and educational interventions that can improve outcomes, especially for cognition, peer interactions, and the development of language, and allows families to cope better with the impact of these challenges in their child. Autism is being diagnosed at increasing rates, partly as a result of the development of evidence-based screening instruments. However, there is strong evidence of disparities in rates of diagnosis and service utilization for Latino children as compared to non-Latino white children. The overall goal of the present project, a collaboration of researchers, primary care providers and families, is to provide evidence for the effectiveness of a “Supported Screening” model to enhance identification and successful referral for Latino children. Supported Screening integrates three components targeting key needs of Latino families: (1) materials to increase awareness of developmental milestones among Latino parents of young children in order to spur early action on concerns and increase the likelihood of accessing evidence-based screening programs for autism; (2) an evidence-based screening program adapted for use with Latino families and evidence-based training protocols for primary health care staff to enhance the use and effectiveness of these programs by increasing the dialogue around parental concerns; and (3) a family navigation program to more effectively link Latino families with an extant referral network of providers for children with autism to increase the likelihood and/or reduce the delay for appropriate evaluation and early intervention services and increase enrollment in these services. In collaboration with key partners in the District of Columbia, Unity HealthCare (UHC), large primary care system serving Latino families, family support organizations, and early childhood services, the proposed project will first adapt and refine the components of Supported Screening for Latino families and test their feasibility and acceptability. Then, the effectiveness of intervention will be tested by comparing the rate of developmental concerns raised by families and the number of children receiving screenings by UHC and the rate of successful referrals for further evaluation in the provider network for the year prior to and following implementation of Supported Screening.