

Officials Announce \$3.7 Million In Grants For Autism Center & Research

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STATE — Marking a new, coordinated approach to autism research in New Jersey, First Lady Mary Pat Christie and Health and Senior Services Commissioner Mary E. O’Dowd today joined the Governor’s Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Autism to announce \$3.7 million in grants to create a New Jersey Autism Center of Excellence and a separate research site.

The Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health at Montclair State University was awarded \$1.5 million over 5 years to establish a Center of Excellence to coordinate all autism research funded by the Governor’s Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Autism. In addition, The Rutgers University Institute for Human Genetics was awarded \$2.2 million over 5 years to focus on the genetics of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs).

“With the creation of the Autism Center of Excellence we will have one voice leading New Jersey’s research of ASDs,” said O’Dowd. “These grants will help us better understand ASDs and allow our families with special needs children to benefit from the best research New Jersey has to offer.”

The Center of Excellence will serve as a coordinating center to share and promote clinical research done by Council grantees and will work in partnership with the Governor’s Council on new collaborations.

“In my role, I have been given a tremendous opportunity to build awareness and promote greater understanding of Autism,” said First Lady Mary Pat Christie. “Today is a very exciting day for the many families touched by this developmental disorder, marking another step on the path to better understanding and more effective treatment. With the designation of a Center of Excellence and the announcement of \$3.7 million in grants, we are giving hope to New Jersey families and advancing the state’s firm commitment to individuals with autism by providing them every possible resource to grow to their full potential.”

The grants announced today are part of a total of \$8 million in autism research grants supported by the Governor’s Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Autism. The remaining \$4.3 million in grants will be awarded through a competitive grant process by the end of the year.

“This funding marks a true commitment to find new and innovative ways to help New Jersey families challenged by Autism Spectrum Disorders,” said Dr. Caroline Eggerding, chair of the Governor’s Council for Medical Research and Treatment of Autism. “The grants ensure that only the most outstanding, highest quality research is supported with state funding,” Eggerding said.

Today's grants were announced after a tour of the Ben Samuels Children's Center at Montclair State University. The grants were reviewed by an Independent Scientific Merit Review Panel, consisting of 15 nationally known experts in autism clinical research.

Montclair State University President Susan A. Cole said the Ben Samuels Children's Center has provided outstanding programs for young children with autism for many years and the University's new Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health has expanded its work in this important field.

"We are very grateful to the Governor's Council for this major grant to Montclair State to become the statewide Coordinating Center for autism research and treatment. The University is deeply committed to this effort, and we are confident that this opportunity will enable us to make a measureable and sustained difference in the lives of New Jersey children," Cole said.

"Autism is a major health concern in the State of New Jersey," said Dr. Linda Brzustowicz, Professor and Chair of the Department of Genetics at Rutgers University. "This program from the Governor's Council will greatly facilitate the development of new research initiatives across the state."

Dr. Brzustowicz said she and her research team at Rutgers University "are honored to have been chosen as the first research project to be supported by this new coordinated program. We look forward to working with the Coordinating Center and the future research programs to break new ground in understanding the causes of and developing new treatments for autism and related conditions."

The grants announced today build on investments made in the past by the Governor's Council. A total of \$9 million in funding was awarded to six centers between 2008 and 2011 to improve early identification of children with ASDs and to increase the number of multi-disciplinary evaluations.

Read more: <http://njtoday.net/2012/06/28/officials-announce-3-7-million-in-grants-for-autism-center-research/#ixzz24qj2FBWq>