

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE UNVEILS REGIONAL AUTISM CENTERS

April 20, 2009 – Responding to the needs of the growing number of Pennsylvanians living with an autism spectrum disorder, Secretary of Public Welfare Estelle B. Richman today unveiled three new regional autism centers geared toward improving access to services, education, research and training for families and professionals in need.

“The increased prevalence of autism has resulted in a greater demand for services, but the development of new programs has not kept pace – a challenge that has left many families searching for quality services,” said Secretary Richman. “In pooling our statewide resources to create these regional centers, Pennsylvania will be better suited to continue bridging the gap to critical programs and information that can significantly enhance the lives of our families.”

Funded through the Department of Public Welfare, each center represents a partnership of medical centers, centers of autism research and services, universities and other providers of services involved in the treatment and care of adults and children with an autism spectrum disorder.

The centers, a primary recommendation of the Pennsylvania Autism Task Force commissioned in 2004, will improve regional access to quality services and interventions, provide information and support to families, train professionals in best practices and facilitate collaboration among providers of services throughout the commonwealth.

Centers will be focused in the eastern, western and central parts of Pennsylvania.

They include:

- Central: Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center; Philhaven’s Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities; Vista Foundation.
- Eastern: University of Pennsylvania Center for Autism Research; Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia; Holy Family University; Drexel University; Lehigh University.
- Western: UPMC Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic, University of Pittsburgh, School of Medicine Center for Autism and Developmental Disorders; The Watson Institute; Dr. Gertrude Barber Center, Inc.; UPMC Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh, Child Development Unit Autism Center; University of Pittsburgh, Department of

Rehabilitation Science and Technology; University of Pittsburgh, School of Education, Special Education; The Achievement Center and LEADERS program, Mercyhurst College.

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a set of five disorders that include Autistic Disorder, Asperger Syndrome, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, Rett Syndrome and Pervasive Development Disorder. Children and adults living with autism generally have impairments in social, communicative, and behavior development that are frequently accompanied by problems with cognitive functioning, learning, attention and sensory processing.

To learn more about the regional centers or for more information about programs and services for Pennsylvanians with autism, visit www.dpw.state.pa.us.