



Autism Society Ventura County

Autism Society Ventura County Advocacy Committee

Autism Society Ventura County advocates for local public policies that improve the lives of children and adults with Autism. These policies include early intervention, K-12 education, postsecondary education, housing, transition services, employment, healthcare, transportation, and home and community-based services and supports.

Our Vision Statement

Ventura County is the best place in the world to live for Autistic individuals. All Ventura County Residents are empowered and living their best life; their rights are understood and protected. Individuals with Autism of all ages are encouraged to assert their thoughts and ideas and contribute their unique perspectives; they are understood and well received by others. They hold positions of power and influence and lead with sensitivity. From diagnosis to end of life, individuals with Autism have access to the best that Ventura County has to offer and continue to help our community thrive and grow.

ASVC Statement on Policy

Autism Society Ventura County (ASVC) represents individuals and families living with Autism. ASVC partners with other local organizations to improve the lives of all marginalized community members in Ventura County. We believe each family and the individual with Autism has the right to learn about and then select the options they feel are most appropriate. By connecting people to policy, Autism Society Ventura County relies upon our network of people with Autism, parents, guardians, family members, caregivers, professionals, and other partners to respond to issues across the lifespan. ASVC is non-partisan.

For questions or to give input on our policy priorities, contact Advocacy@autismventura.org.

Autism Society Ventura County and its affiliates are committed to these core advocacy principles:

- Policies should build upon a strong integrated network of community-based resources and services that support and empower Autistic individuals that will lead to healthy development.
- Advocacy should include collaboration with other partners, including non-disability groups, to strategically align common goals and achieve systemic policy change in underrepresented communities.
- Policies should ensure that services and supports, including healthcare, education, and transitional services, are portable within the County of Ventura.
- Policies should address and seek to rectify the inadequate range of adult services and supports.
- Policies should prioritize the wishes of the individual with Autism across the lifespan, with input from the family and team of service providers, professionals, and friends when desired or necessary.

Board Approved September 11, 2024

- Policies should be culturally inclusive, ensuring mutual respect and genuine appreciation of diversity.
- Policies should be available in English and Spanish.

ASVC Priorities & Policy Guidelines

Education: Promote educational environments where all students are welcomed, safe, valued, and supported to learn alongside their peers. Youth with disabilities deserve a smooth transition to post-secondary education, employment, or meaningful day activities. To ensure all students reach their full potential, school communities must embrace diversity among learners and offer flexible learning and assessment options. This approach lays the foundation for educational equity which will lead to opportunity in all aspects of students' lives. The educational system must provide universally designed instruction and programs that support every aspect of the learning journey. The K-12 public school system must focus on enabling all students to lead the most meaningful and independent lives possible. Students with disabilities should have equal access to all programs, opportunities, and experiences available to their non-disabled peers, especially those that enhance their educational and social-emotional development. Finally, the rights of students and their families must be upheld throughout the IEP or educational process without requiring them to have legal expertise.

Community Living and Housing: The housing crisis in Ventura County has complex and deep-rooted impacts on all vulnerable populations and especially the disability community. Housing providers must be educated about available funding programs and how to access them for developing housing for people with disabilities. The funding for housing through Tri-Counties Regional Center remains an underutilized resource due to a lack of awareness and understanding about how to leverage and utilize these funds. We urge policy makers to prioritize inclusive housing developments designated as both low-income and fully accessible for people with disabilities. We advocate for immediate policy expansions of ADU policy, Section 8 housing, and required set-asides, along with creative living solutions needed to meet current and future housing demands of people with disabilities and their service providers. Currently, people with developmental disabilities lack local-level agency involvement and representation within government to ensure their housing needs are met. It is essential to have knowledgeable local representatives who advocate for this community in all housing discussions and policy development.

Transportation: Expand access to high quality, comprehensive, accessible, and affordable transportation for all people with disabilities. Dial A Ride, Access, and public transit systems must be held accountable for providing high-quality service to people with disabilities. These systems should be well-funded to ensure excellence in service delivery. Funding for transportation should support single occupant ride share services for individuals that require it to enhance accessibility and to meet their specific transportation needs.

Employment: Seek to increase the employment rate for Autistic individuals. Presume that all are capable of competitive employment, community service, volunteerism, and day activities. Develop programs that enhance the capacity of businesses and organizations to provide competitive employment opportunities for every person that desires to work. Expand on employment programs through agencies such as the Department of Rehabilitation, Workforce

Development Board, PathPoint and ARC. Strive to showcase the unique strengths individuals with Autism bring to the workforce. Encourage businesses and organizations to see employing Autistic individuals as more than just an inclusive practice, but also as a strategic advantage.

Family Caregiving: Advocate for the expansion of local initiatives that provide a comprehensive family caregiving support system. Ensure respite is fully funded and available for all caregivers to avoid caregiver burnout. Fully fund other critical family support programs. Advocate for rate/wage increases for caregivers and service providers. Fully fund and expand In Home Supportive Services (IHSS) and other programs that provide a safety net for family caregivers across the lifespan.

Human Rights: Strive to protect human and civil rights of individuals with Autism to live freely and without the risk of harm. Actively promote abolishing the use of aversive processes, stigmatization, and abuse and neglect by supporting protective policies and legislation. Ensure our local elected officials are aware of the astonishing rates of neglect and abuse within the Autistic population. Ensure that all Autistic individuals and their families have access to equal representation across every system that serves them, particularly the legal system which often fails to provide critical information in an accessible manner and/or an advocate who understands the risks/needs of the individual.

Health Care: Expand access to high quality, comprehensive, accessible, accurate, preventative, individualized, and affordable health care services for all individuals with Autism. Autistic individuals should be presumed capable of making informed, educated, autonomous decisions about their health care needs. They should be provided all necessary support to empower and enable their decision making. Individuals with Autism should be informed of their right to have a trusted person to help make medical decisions should they choose or when it is necessary. Expanded access to Public and private Behavioral Health services is critical, as they remain inaccessible to those with Autism and other neurodevelopmental disorders in Ventura County. We advocate for Medi-Cal/SSI public awareness programs in Ventura County. We support the expansion of services covered by medical benefits to include alternative and holistic options, ensuring individuals have access to a broader range of care that meets their diverse needs.

Regarding COVID19: The COVID Pandemic had a significant and unjust impact on people with disabilities that will leave a lasting impact on their lives. The lack of individualized support, including educational services, was a detriment to many people with disabilities. These inequities must be considered in all current and future policy decisions.