



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UMass Boston, Tufts Medical Center, and Northeastern University receive \$3.9 million grant to improve earlier detection and treatment of child autism

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) has awarded an R01 grant to a collaboration between the University of Massachusetts, Tufts Medical Center, and Healthcare Systems Engineering Institute at Northeastern University to improve the timeliness and equity of early identification and access to effective treatment of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). One in 68 American children have ASD and while early intervention is critical, timely detection and access to care remain problems, particularly for underserved populations. The award, “*Addressing Systemic Health Disparities in Early ASD Identification and Treatment*” will integrate health services researchers, childhood autism experts, and systems engineering researchers in a novel approach to (a) improve early detection of ASD and (b) increase early access to autism specific intervention services, especially for children who often do not receive the known benefits of these.

The central features of ASD are difficulties in social communication, and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior and interests. The diagnosis is shared by people who vary widely in abilities and symptoms, from those with intellectual and language disabilities, to people without intellectual disabilities but who have some degree of social impairment. “Despite the significant number of people of all ages identified with ASD, access to effective services remains inconsistent at best,” said NIMH Director Thomas Insel, M.D. “This research is aimed at testing care strategies, adaptable across communities, in which identification of need and engagement in optimal interventions and services will be standard for all ages.” The study will be implemented in three programs serving children in Boston regions with high social/economic risk and poverty.

UMass Professor of Clinical Psychology Alice Carter (PI), a recognized expert in the development of children with autism spectrum disorder, will lead this research team along with Radley Sheldrick from Tufts Medical Center and others from UMass, Tufts, and Northeastern University.

The Healthcare Systems Engineering Institute (James Benneyan, PI) at Northeastern, which focuses on impacting healthcare through integration of research, application, and education in systems engineering methods, houses four federally-awarded healthcare engineering centers and three internship and post-doctoral development programs, with core funding from the National Science Foundation, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid, National Institutes of Health, Veterans Health Administration, and Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

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