The Roadmap to Early and Equitable Autism Identification

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It has been almost 2 decades since the first study documenting disparities in diagnoses of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) was published. Although the prevalence of ASD has increased during this time, Black, Hispanic, and low-income children remain less likely to be identified early. In a recent study, researchers found that almost one-quarter of children with documented signs and symptoms of ASD are undiagnosed, a circumstance 1.7 times more likely for Black children and 1.6 times more likely for Hispanic children than for white children. The median age of diagnosis across groups is 52 months, well beyond the age at which ASD can be identified. As a result, many children are excluded from early ASD-specific interventions at a young age, when these secondary prevention interventions and related tertiary prevention activities that target ASD-related co-occurring conditions are most likely to be effective. Clearly, there is work to do to improve the equity of ASD diagnosis and to reduce the age of diagnosis.

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