INTRODUCTION
Good morning. It is an honor to be here today with so many people who are dedicated to the issues surrounding autism and other developmental disabilities. Our children deserve to get the care they need and we must continue to strengthen the supports that are in place.

You represent the collective individual and organizational efforts that have made Wisconsin a leader in the field of Autism Spectrum Disorders.

On many fronts, Wisconsin has made great progress in addressing the needs of children, youth and their families with ASD and other developmental disabilities. Though there is still work to be done, we are here today to welcome you into a Community of Practice where we will work together to strengthen the ASD infrastructure in Wisconsin.

As we launch this new Community of Practice, I’d like to acknowledge the work and achievements that have been made possible by many of you here today.

Waiver: In terms of intervention and treatment for ASD, Wisconsin is recognized for the broad range of services available to our families, particularly those services funded within the waiver.

Governor’s Council: Wisconsin has been involved in a variety of planning efforts in recent years to address specific issues, including the Governor’s Task Force on Autism. This Task Force was appointed by Governor Doyle in the spring of 2004 in response to concerns about utilization of the state’s Medicaid program to provide treatment for children with ASD.

AAP and Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs Program: We have also been working with the American Academy of Pediatrics, the five Regional Centers for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs, and others to promote developmental screening of all infants and
children, and comprehensive developmental assessment of those suspected of having ASD.

National and Regional Work: Wisconsin participated in the National Medical Home Autism Initiative planning process, along with other states in the region, to identify key issues to address from a state planning perspective. This initiative defined what is meant by Medical Home, and the role it can play in the early identification of children with ASD and referral to appropriate services. (A final copy of their report is in your packet.)

Research: In terms of research, a number of investigators at the University of Wisconsin are studying various aspects of ASD, including how ASD affects the lives of adolescents, adults with ASD, and their families. They are also looking at early communication and language skills in toddlers with ASD, issues related to speech among children with ASD, and studies of brain structure and function associated with ASD.

We are one of fourteen states participating in a national study to determine the prevalence and trends of ASD. You’ll be hearing more about this work later from Maureen Durkin.

Professional Development: The UW-Waisman Center is a member of a multi-university Program called the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders. This program promotes optimal development and learning of infants, children, and youth with ASD and provides support to their families through the use of evidence-based practices.

This Center aims to increase the number of highly qualified personnel serving children with ASD through sustainable technical assistance and professional development, and to increase the capacity of states to implement evidence-based practices for early identification, intervention, education, professional development, and technical assistance.
Increasing Awareness & Reducing Stigma: In addition, many organizations have and continue to conduct public awareness campaigns and training programs targeted to a variety of audiences including parents, educators, health care providers, and other stakeholders. We also have special efforts targeted toward schools so that our educators can have the skills they need to work with children with ASD.

Re-Introduction of Insurance Mandate: Most recent step forward. So important because:
- Children with ASD deserve to get the treatment that they need to help them live as much like typical children as possible
- The earlier treatment can begin, the better the outcomes
- Parents shouldn’t have to pay for this treatment out of their own pockets

FEDERAL GRANT OFFERS NEXT ASD OPPORTUNITY
- Need to keep progress going – need to knit threads together
- Need to make sure all perspectives are represented at the table
- Need to work on common strategies in order to make the leap to the next level for kids and families in our state

So, when the federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau issued its Request for Proposals to fund six state grants, we felt Wisconsin was ideally positioned to submit a competitive application because so many good things had already occurred and we were ready to move forward together. We are utilizing the Community of Practice format to build upon our already strong foundation and our goal is not to create new plans, but rather to build on plans that are already developed.

I’m proud to say that Wisconsin was one of only six states to receive this highly competitive grant from the U.S. Maternal and Child Health Bureau. Connections is a three-year grant, with a budget of $300,000 per year through the federal Combating Autism Act of 2006.

This shared work is called Connections because that is what it is fundamentally about – making connections among all the ASD
stakeholders in Wisconsin and using our combined strengths to move forward in helping our children and youth and their families.

The purpose is to:
- create and facilitate a statewide network of key leadership organizations to address the range of challenges for children with ASD, their families, and the providers who work with them,
- to assure that a continuum of activities occurs to implement improved service systems.
- Partners include leaders in autism from around Wisconsin, including parents and families, researchers, physicians and health care providers, and a variety of state agencies.
- Connections will work to strengthen statewide infrastructure by connecting ASD-related initiatives under one umbrella, sponsoring a statewide outreach campaign, and assuring access to information for all.

To implement this infrastructure in Wisconsin, we will use nationally recognized frameworks to create a Wisconsin-specific ASD plan to implement improved services for children and youth with ASD and other developmental disabilities.

The Department’s Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs program is uniquely positioned to take the lead in facilitating this Community of Practice on Autism Spectrum Disorders. The Maternal and Child Health Program is accountable for the six National outcomes:

1. family as leaders and decision makers;
2. care within the context of a Medical Home;
3. health care access and financing;
4. early and continuous identification of children with special needs;
5. a system of services that is easy for families to use; and
6. transition to adult life.

These outcomes directly correspond to the identified need areas for children with ASD, their families, and the professionals who serve them.
The Department’s Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs program has a history and strength in bringing groups together around the needs of children and youth and their families. The program has also co-facilitated the Community of Practice on Transition, and understands the value of this method and has the experience and network of partners around the state to bring people together. We respect the role of families, and place family-centered care at the heart of our efforts. It is through collaboration that we can accomplish more.

While we’ve acknowledged some specific initiatives today, we know that all of you have already been doing a great deal to move Wisconsin forward. Together, we are dedicated to providing the best possible services to children and youth with autism spectrum disorder and other developmental disabilities, and their families and supporters. We are pleased and excited to bring everyone together to share our work through a Community of Practice on ASD – the success of which will build on the work of everyone in the room.

Thank you.