

NCSA NATIONAL
COUNCIL
ON SEVERE
AUTISM

AUTHENTIC AWARENESS

AUTISM ASSEMBLY '26

PROGRAM OF EVENTS

July 14–16, 2026
Washington, D.C.

Embassy Suites by Hilton · D.C. Convention Center



ncsautism.org/dc26

WELCOME

Welcome

Last year, families came to Washington and told their stories. This year, we return with the people in power at the table.

Federal leaders, researchers, and advocates are here to listen and to answer. Severe and profound autism asks more of us than awareness. It asks for something authentic: recognition, sound policy, and real solutions for the individuals, families, and caregivers who live it every day. Authentic awareness means being willing to have the hard conversations, discomfort and all.

That is the work ahead, and the reason you are here. Thank you for showing up, for speaking plainly, and for refusing to look away. Let's get to work.

Jill Escher / President

Jackie Kancir / Executive Director

EVENT CO-CHAIRS

OUR MISSION

Pursuing recognition, policy, and solutions for the surging population of individuals, families, and caregivers affected by severe forms of autism and related disorders.

Recognition

Making the severely and profoundly affected visible in research, media, and public policy.

Policy

Advancing federal and state policy that reflects the real needs of severe autism.

Solutions

Building the services, supports, and systems these families actually depend on.

On the cover: parent caregiver Loretta Boronat and her VIP son Daniel Boronat · 2025 NCSA Authentic Awareness Autism Assembly

YOUR HOSTS FOR THE DAY

NCSA Leadership

Welcoming you, introducing our speakers, and guiding today's program.

EVENT CO-CHAIRS



Jill Escher
PRESIDENT



Jackie Kancir
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

HOST COMMITTEE



Amy Lutz
VICE PRESIDENT



Cristina Gaudio
LEGAL & POLICY FELLOW



Alison Singer
BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Jonah Zimiles
BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Michelle Wright
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Morning Program

MODULE 1

Agency & Federal Policy

-
- | | |
|-------|--|
| 9:00 | Welcome & Opening Remarks
Jill Escher, President, NCSA |
| 9:10 | Mary Lazare
Principal Deputy Administrator, Administration for Community Living
“The Federal Social Services Landscape” |
| 9:30 | Dr. Andrea Beckel-Mitchener
Acting Director, National Institute of Mental Health
“NIH Support for Autism Research” |
| 9:50 | Adam Dicker & Phil Vetrano
HELPIpedia · SpecialNeeds.help
“Empowering Families. Building Community. Finding Help.” |
| 10:10 | BREAK |
-

MODULE 2

Grassroots & Impact

Sponsored by Autism Science Foundation

-
- | | |
|-------|---|
| 10:25 | A Tribute to Justin McCafferty
Kim McCafferty, with Pat Miller & Mitch Baum · NCSA New Jersey Chapter |
| 10:45 | Dr. Dawn Turnage
Associate Professor, University of Central Florida
“Profound Autism Prevalence & Caregiver Quality of Life” |
| 11:00 | Sarah Kernion
Host, Inchstones by Sarah
“The Discipline of Not Looking Away” |
| 11:15 | Steve Gonyea
NCSA New York Chapter State Chair
“Wins for Families” |
| 11:30 | Keith Snider
Health Policy Director, Health Policy Source
“Media Training & Q&A” |
-

Lunch & the afternoon program continue on the next page →

Afternoon Program

LUNCH Lunch & Remarks

Sponsored by Words Bookstore

12:00 **Lunch & Networking**
Buffet lunch

12:30 **Lunchtime Remarks**
Joe Joyce, Executive Director, Autism Society of America · Judith Ursitti, Profound Autism Alliance · & Others

12:50 **BREAK**

MODULE 3 Policy Planks & Asks

Sponsored by Escher Fund for Autism

1:10 **Cristina Gaudio**
Legal & Policy Fellow, NCSA
“Delivering Care Access & Reforming the HCBS Settings Rule”

1:25 **Michelle Wright**
Board of Directors, NCSA
“Transparent Data & Risk Adjustment”

1:40 **Jackie Kancir**
Executive Director, NCSA
“Commissioning a Comprehensive Federal Study on the State of Caregiving for Severe Autism”

MODULE 4 Breakouts

2:10 **Breakout Rotation 1**
Policy-plank stations, front & back of the room

2:40 **Breakout Rotation 2**
Trainers switch stations

3:10 **BREAK**

3:20 **Geography Breakout**
Small Groups and Large State Planning

3:50 **Group Photo**
By Kerry-Ann Morrell

Dinner, Awards & the film *Uncertain* begin at 5:30 PM. See page 8 →

Speakers



Mary Lazare

Principal Deputy Administrator, ACL



Dr. Andrea Beckel-Mitchener

Acting Director, NIMH



Adam Dicker

Co-Founder, HELPiPedia



Phil Vetrano

Co-Founder & President, HELPiPedia



Kim McCafferty

NCSA New Jersey Chapter



Pat Miller

Co-Chair, NCSA New Jersey Chapter

THE PEOPLE AT THE PODIUM, CONTINUED

Speakers



Mitch Baum

Co-Chair, NCSA New Jersey Chapter



Dr. Dawn Turnage

Associate Professor, University of
Central Florida



Sarah Kernion

Host, Inchstones by Sarah



Steve Gonyea

NCSA New York Chapter State Chair



Keith Snider

Health Policy Director, Health Policy
Source



Amanda Dyer

Co-Director & Producer, "Uncertain"

Dinner, Awards & Film

5:30 Dining begins

6:00 Awards Ceremony

7:15 Film preview & Q&A

The 2026 Honorees

Celebrating the advocates, families, and storytellers moving severe autism forward.

#AuthenticAwareness Award

Eileen Lamb (*recognized in absentia*)

Phoenix Award for Exceptional Resilience

Christine Miles Kincaid

Amplifier Award for New Media

Sarah Kernion

Academic Integrity Award

Dr. Dawn Turnage

Chapter of the Year

NCSA New Jersey (*accepted by Pat Miller & Mitch Baum*)

Truth Finder Award for Journalism

Craig Patrick, FOX 13 Tampa Bay (*recognized in absentia*)

Artist of the Year

Luke Kincaid

Rising Star Award

Starr Garcia

Beacon Award for Community Activism

Steve Gonyea

Lifetime Achievement Award

Jackie Ceonzo

VIP Medal Recipients

Tonight we celebrate every one of them.

- Daniel Boronat
- Michael Calandra
- Dominick Casuccio
- Jadyne Cullen
- Sophie Escher
- Domingo Garcia Jr.
- David Gonyea
- Dustin Gonyea
- Ondrell Gonyea
- Luke Kincaid
- Joey Kuchipudi
- Zachary Pagnani
- Katie Rash
- Justin Turnage
- Jeffrey Cook



The Film. Co-Director & Producer Amanda Dyer introduces a 30-minute preview of *Uncertain: The Search for Supported Living*, her forthcoming documentary, followed by a live Q&A with the producer.

The floor plan of the Convention Level includes the following areas:

- Capital Foyer South** and **Capital Foyer North** at the top of the plan.
- Shaw** room on the left side.
- Washingtonian** room, highlighted with a white border and a circled '2' in the bottom left corner.
- Capital A** and **Capital B** rooms, which are grouped together and highlighted with a white border and a circled '1' in the center.
- Capital C** and **Capital D** rooms on the right side.
- Two restrooms are located between the Capital Foyers and the main room blocks.
- Entrances are indicated by arrows at the top left and bottom center.

1 Capital Ballroom A & B

2 Washingtonian Boardroom

REGISTRATION

RESTROOMS

WI-FI

Beyond the Sessions

Local picks shared by Christopher Myers, who knows the District well.

IN THE HOTEL

Fitness center Ground floor, open 24/7 for hotel guests.

OUT IN THE DISTRICT

Get around. The Metro is fast, affordable, and runs until midnight. For the Hill, Uber and Lyft are quickest, and cabs usually wait out front. To reach Georgetown, take the Orange or Blue Line to Foggy Bottom and walk up.

With Gratitude

[w o r d s]
B O O K S T O R E



THE TRUE PROFESSIONAL™

and
The Zimiles Family
proudly support
NCSA

wordsbookstore.com

thetrueprofessional.org

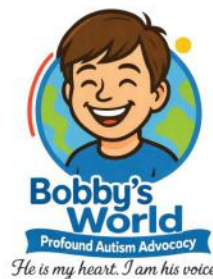
AND WITH THANKS TO

Escher Fund  for Autism



*Eye Disease
Consultants*

snack*



WITH APPRECIATION

The MacInnis Family · The Wright Family

Participate in Research

ASF's Free Online Directory
Connecting Families and Researchers



Find or Submit a Study



AUTISMSCIENCEFOUNDATION.ORG/PARTICIPATE-IN-RESEARCH



THIS IS WHO WE DO IT FOR

Every face, a reason to keep going.

Thank you for standing with the individuals, families, and caregivers affected by severe forms of autism and related disorders. Your voice this week becomes recognition, policy, and real solutions.

NATIONAL COUNCIL ON SEVERE AUTISM

PO Box 26853, San Jose, CA 95159

info@ncsautism.org · policy@ncsautism.org

ncsautism.org

FOLLOW

[@ncsautism](https://www.facebook.com/ncsautism) · [@NCSAutismOrg](https://www.instagram.com/ncsautism)

[facebook](#) · [instagram](#) · [linkedin](#) · [youtube](#)

NCSA | NATIONAL
COUNCIL
ON SEVERE
AUTISM