

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
4TH DISTRICT, NEW JERSEY

CONSTITUENT SERVICE CENTERS:
1540 Kuser Road, Suite A9
Hamilton, NJ 08619-3828
(609) 585-7878
TTY (609) 585-3650

108 Lacey Road, Suite 38A
Whiting, NJ 08759-1331
(732) 350-2300

2373 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3004
(202) 225-3765

<http://chrissmith.house.gov>



Congress of the United States House of Representatives

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“IACC Key to Combating Autism”

*Remarks by Rep. Chris Smith
IACC Full Committee Meeting
L'Enfant Plaza Hotel
July 10, 2012*

Fifteen years ago, parents of two autistic children—Bobbi and Billy Gallagher—walked into my district office and asked for help on what they believed to be a significant autism prevalence spike in their township of Brick.

They told me that from 1970-79, there was only one reported case of autism. From 1980-89, there were 4. And by 1990-95, the number of children afflicted had jumped to 27.

School administrators dismissed their research—and suggested it was all a case of people moving there. The Gallaghers' data however showed all of these children were born in Brick.

Concerned, I invited CDC, ATSDR, and the New Jersey Department of Health to investigate. Back then not much was being done at the federal level. CDC's commitment at the time was a paltry \$287 thousand per year, straight-lined for five consecutive years.

Within months of study however, it became disturbingly clear that Brick had more cases than could reasonably be expected. Equally disturbing, data calls from other towns and cities suggested an elevated number of cases in those municipalities as well.

So in January 1999 I introduced the Autism Statistics, Surveillance, Research and Epidemiology Act (ASSURE) to establish a national program to combat autism which would include 3-5 Centers of Excellence and a federal advisory committee—the forerunner of the IACC.

After months of intense lobbying, 199 members of Congress signed on as cosponsors and the bill became Title I of the Children's Health Act of 2000.

The Combating Autism Act, legislation which I introduced, was reauthorized last September at \$693 million over 3 years.

Under Dr. Thomas Insel, IACC has diligently sought evidence-based answers to an array of vexing questions concerning causation, risk factors—including genetic and non-genetic factors, parental age, and premature birth—and the most efficacious interventions designed to mitigate the disability.

Great strides have been made in unraveling the mystery of autism—but clearly—we have so much more to do.

For example, the Stanford California Autism twins study looked at 192 pairs of twins and strongly suggested a link to environmental factors. If an identical twin develops autism, the study found a 70% chance the other twin will do the same. Perhaps more significantly, if a fraternal twin developed autism, the study found a 35% chance that the other fraternal twin will do the same, raising questions that beg additional investigation.

Finally, what IACC does not only impacts Americans malaffected by autism, but the whole world. In May of last year, I chaired the first ever hearing examining the magnitude and severity of the global health crisis of autism. Dr. Andy Shih with Autism Speaks testified that 1% of the world's population, or 67 million people, are affected with a form of autism.

On a trip to Lagos, Nigeria, in 2007, I met with Mr. Chidi Izuwah, the parent of an autistic child. Mr. Izuwah is the Executive Director of the Public Private Partnership Resource Center in Abuja and his wife, Dr. Doris Izuwah is the Executive Director of the Olg Health Foundation & Autism Center in Port Harcourt. They told me of the large numbers of Nigerian children suffering with autism and of the lack of government or other supports. As a result of my discussions with the Izuwah's, I introduced in February 2008, the Global Autism Assistance Act, which I have re-introduced this Congress (HR 2700). This Global Autism bill, directs the Administrator for the United States Agency for International Development to establish and administer a health and education grant program to support activities by nongovernmental organizations and other service providers focused on autism in developing countries and also establishes a "teach the teachers" program to train health and education professionals working with autistic children in developing countries.