

The WA INCLUDE Collaborative is excited to announce the launch of the **Care Coordination Training Curriculum and Pilot Program Initiative**, a project aimed at improving care coordination for families and youth with autism/IDD and co-occurring mental health needs. Our working mission is to provide training that strengthens care coordinators' skills and knowledge while evaluating current systems and processes to recommend strategies that improve access to care in a financially sustainable manner.

The initial concept for a care coordination curriculum and training initiative originated from a conversation between Jim Mancini and Matilda Sampson. The official launch of this work began in August 2025 with an interdisciplinary team, including:

- Thanh Nguyen – Psychologist & WA INCLUDE postdoctoral scholar (Project Lead)
- Jim Mancini – Director of WA INCLUDE Collaborative
- Matilda Sampson – Community Health Equity & Access Coordinator at Excelsior Wellness, Spokane
- Shayla Collins – Continuing Education Specialist, UW Center for Child and Family Wellbeing
- Gabi Sepulveda – Acting Assistant Professor & Psychologist, UW Dept. of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science

Research Project:

On November 2, 2025, the team received the UW Population Health Tier 1 Grant to fund foundational research on our work from January 1 through August 31, 2026 under the title: *“A Community-Engaged Approach to Identifying Gaps and Creating Solutions in Care Coordination for Autistic Youth with Co-occurring Mental Health Needs.”*

Autistic youth experience disproportionately high rates of mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, suicidality, and self-injurious behaviors, often resulting in emergency department visits and psychiatric hospitalizations. These risks increase with age and are further elevated among youth with intellectual disabilities, language impairments, and lower adaptive functioning. While care coordination is a promising strategy for supporting youth with mental health challenges, current practices often fall short for autistic youth with co-occurring conditions—leaving families without adequate support and burdened by financial and emotional strain. Our project seeks to address these gaps by developing a community-informed Care Coordination Training Curriculum (CCTC) to equip care coordinators with the tools and knowledge needed to better serve this population.

Guided by community engagement and interdisciplinary collaboration, this mixed-methods study will identify gaps, barriers, and facilitators to effective care coordination through needs assessments, World Café sessions, and virtual focus groups. We will then develop and refine a stakeholder-vetted CCTC manual using iterative feedback and lay the groundwork for future implementation by recruiting community partners and care coordinator cohorts for a pilot study using the finalized curriculum. Findings from this research will generate foundational data on effective care coordination and inform scalable training interventions, paving the way for future research and competitive funding opportunities such as UW PHI Tier 2 and NIH R21.

Looking Ahead

We look forward to collaborating with stakeholders across Washington State to co-create solutions that improve care coordination for autistic youth and their families. Stay tuned for updates and opportunities to get involved in this important work!