As an interdisciplinary, clinical leadership education program, NJLEND integrates family-centered, culturally competent, life course and social determinants and public health perspectives to address ASD and related neurodevelopmental disabilities. NJLEND goals, objectives, and competencies will be achieved through: 1) the interdisciplinary training of 9-10 long-term trainees from 7-10 disciplines by an interdisciplinary faculty and community partners; 2) interdisciplinary and family-centered education of additional trainees, including all medical students at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School; 3) continuing education of practicing professionals and families; and 4) consultation and technical assistance to improve systems of care.

NJ, a state without a LEND program, has the highest reported prevalence of ASD in the country. As of 2010, 1 in 45 of NJ’s children was identified with ASD compared to the national average of 1 in 68. Though ASD can be diagnosed as early as 2 years, children in NJ were diagnosed at 4 years of age in 2010, missing the benefits of early and intensive intervention. In 2013, children with special health care needs accounted for 12% of the population served by NJ’s Maternal and Child Health Program. Despite their increased need for health and other services, only 38.3% received coordinated, ongoing, comprehensive care within a medical home. NJLEND will develop cohorts of leaders who will contribute to building interdisciplinary, family-centered, and culturally competent systems of care to address the needs of children with ASD and other disabilities and their families.

A unique set of university, state, local, and family partnerships ensure that the NJLEND is a model for a LEND program in a community-wide context. Children’s Specialized Hospital (CSH), the primary clinical training partner for the LEND, is the largest pediatric rehabilitation hospital in the US. The NJLEND will include seven disciplines in Year 1 from within Rutgers, drawn from both Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences and the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, including: Dentistry, Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics, Family, Nursing, Nutrition, Psychology and Social Work. Disciplines will be expanded in subsequent funding years, and medium-term trainees with a disability will be added.

The long-term interdisciplinary leadership training program, delivered across a 9-month academic calendar, is comprised of 4 integrated curricular components. The weekly didactic seminar series includes 3 courses that run concurrently across the year: Caring for Children with ASD and other Complex Neurodevelopmental Disabilities Across the Lifespan; Policy & Advocacy; and Research: From Bench to Bedside to Community. A rich range of required and elective experiential learning opportunities linked with each module will be offered in family homes and at sites within Rutgers, CSH, and the larger community. Leadership development, based on MCH Leadership Competencies, is integrated into the curriculum and supported by Faculty Discipline Mentors. Clinical training, through practicum or field placements, will equip trainees with the skills and knowledge to provide quality care to children and youth with ASD and related developmental disabilities and their families.