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OVERVIEW

Applied behavioral analysis (ABA) is the process of systematically applying interventions based on learning theory and using them to improve socially important behaviors to a meaningful degree and to demonstrate that the interventions employed are responsible for the improvement. It is often used to treat children with autism or other pervasive developmental disorders (PDD). This policy documents the details regarding the RI General Law for coverage for Autism Services including ABA services. This policy is applicable to commercial products only.

MEDICAL CRITERIA

As documented by BCBSRI Behavioral Health Vendor

PRIOR AUTHORIZATION

Commercial Products

Prior authorization is recommended.

Contact BCBSRI Behavioral Health Vendor at 800-274-2958.

POLICY STATEMENT

Commercial Products

ABA, pharmaceuticals, physical therapy, speech therapy, psychology, psychiatric, and occupational therapy services for the treatment of autism spectrum disorders (ASD), as defined in the most recent edition of the DSM are covered when services have been approved by BCBSRI Behavioral Health Vendor, however:

- o Physical therapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy and psychology, psychiatry, and pharmaceutical services are covered to the extent such services are a covered benefit for other diseases and conditions under such policy.
- o Benefits under the state mandate continue until the covered individual reaches age fifteen (15).
- o Services are provided and/or supervised by an individual licensed by the state in which the service is rendered:
 - a. A licensed applied behavior analyst; or
 - b. A licensed applied behavior assistant analyst under the supervision of a licensed applied behavior analyst; or
 - c. A psychologist with equivalent experience as an applied behavior analyst or a psychologist practicing within their scope of practice.

It is recommended that all ABA providers contact BCBSRI Behavioral Health Vendor at 1-800-274-2958 to obtain prior authorization of ABA services. Authorizations are generally approved for a 6-month period of time and are based on medical necessity.

For benefit plans that are not subject to the Rhode Island Autism Spectrum Disorders Mandate and for self-insured or self-funded groups that have opted NOT to adopt the Rhode Island Autism Spectrum Disorders Mandate, behavioral interventions based on the principles of applied behavioral analysis (ABA and related programs for the treatment of PDDs/ASDs) are a contract exclusion for some members. Please refer to the specific member agreements.

Physical Therapy (PT), Occupational Therapy (OT), and Speech Therapy for Autism Spectrum Disorders (excluding ABA services)

See applicable Physician and Occupational Therapy and Speech policies for criteria for coverage and pre-authorization guidelines.

If a speech language therapist/physical therapist/occupational therapist is certified as an ABA provider and renders ABA services, they must use the specific ABA codes in the coding section of this policy to report these services.

Effective 1/1/14 the \$32,000 yearly maximum is no longer applicable due to the federal healthcare reform mandate that does away with annual dollar limits.

COVERAGE

Benefits may vary between groups/contracts. Please refer to the appropriate Evidence of Coverage or Subscriber Agreement for applicable service benefits/coverage. Services include autism services (including applied behavioral analysis, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech language pathology (SLP) services.

BACKGROUND

As of January 1, 2012, BCBSRI began to provide coverage for ABA services for all large employer groups as part of the Autism Mandate, RI General Law 27-2011-1. Self-funded accounts had the option to elect or decline coverage of ABA services.

ABA is defined per RI General Law 27-2011.11-2 as follows:

27-20.11-1. Mandatory coverage for Autism spectrum disorders.

(a) Every group health insurance contract, or every group hospital or medical expense insurance policy, plan, or group policy delivered, issued for delivery, or renewed in this state, by any health insurance carrier, on or after January 1, 2012, shall provide coverage for autism spectrum disorders; provided, however, the provisions of this chapter shall not apply to contracts, plans or group policies subject to the Small Employer Health Insurance Availability Act, chapter 50 of this title, or subject to the Individual Health Insurance Coverage Act, chapter 18.5 of this title.

27-20.11-2. Definitions.

As used in this chapter:

- (1) "Applied behavior analysis" means the design, implementation, and evaluation of environmental modifications using behavioral stimuli and consequences to produce socially significant improvements in human behavior, including the use of direct observation, measurement and functional analysis of the relationship between environment and behavior.
- (2) "Autism spectrum disorders" means any of the pervasive developmental disorders as defined by the most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) published by the American Psychiatric Association.
- (3) "Health insurance carrier" or "carrier" means any entity subject to the insurance laws and regulations of this state, that contracts or offers to contract to provide, deliver, arrange for, pay for, or reimburse any of the costs of health care services, including, without limitation, an insurance company offering accident and sickness insurance, a health maintenance organization, a nonprofit hospital, medical service corporation, or any other entity subject to chapter 18, 19, 20, or 41 of this title, providing a plan of health insurance, health benefits, or health services.

27-20.11-3. Scope of coverage.

(a) Benefits under this section shall include coverage for applied behavior analysis, physical therapy, speech therapy and occupational therapy services for the treatment of Autism spectrum disorders, as defined in the

most recent edition of the DSM. Provided, however: (1) Coverage for physical therapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy services shall be to the extent such services are a covered benefit for other diseases and conditions under such policy; and (2) Applied behavior analysis shall be limited to thirty-two thousand dollars (\$32,000) per person per year.

(b) Benefits under this section shall continue until the covered individual reaches age fifteen (15).

(c) The health care benefits outlined in this chapter apply only to services delivered within the State of Rhode Island; provided, that all health insurance carriers shall be required to provide coverage for those benefits mandated by this chapter outside of the State of Rhode Island where it can be established through a preauthorization process that the required services are not available in the State of Rhode Island from a provider in the health insurance carrier's network.

27-20.11-4. Medical necessity and appropriateness of treatment.

(a) Upon request of the reimbursing health insurance carrier, all providers shall furnish medical records or other necessary data, which substantiates that initial or continued treatment is at all times medically necessary and appropriate.

(b) Medical necessity criteria may be based in part on evidence of continued improvement as a result of treatment. When the provider cannot establish the medical necessity and/or appropriateness of the treatment modality being provided, neither the health insurer nor the patient shall be obligated to reimburse for that period or type of care that was not established. The exception to the preceding can only be made if the patient has been informed of the provisions of this subsection and has agreed in writing to continue to receive treatment at his or her own expense.

(c) Any subscriber who is aggrieved by a denial of benefits provided under this chapter may appeal a denial in accordance with the rules and regulations promulgated by the department of health pursuant to chapter 17.12 of title 23.

(d) A health insurance carrier may require submission of a treatment plan, including the frequency and duration of treatment, signed by a child psychiatrist, a behavioral developmental pediatrician, a child neurologist or a licensed psychologist with training in child psychology, that the treatment is medically necessary for the patient and is consistent with nationally recognized treatment standards for the condition such as those set forth by the American Academy of Pediatrics. An insurer may require an updated treatment plan no more frequently than on a quarterly basis.

27-20.11-5. Limits on cost sharing.

Benefits for services under this chapter shall be reimbursed in accordance with the respective principles and mechanisms of reimbursement for each health insurance carrier. Except as otherwise provided in this section, any policy, contract or certificate that provides coverage for services under this section may contain provisions for maximum benefits and coinsurance and reasonable limitations, deductibles and exclusions to the extent that these provisions are no more extensive than coverage provided for other conditions or illnesses. Coverage for autism spectrum disorders is otherwise subject to the same terms and conditions of the policy as any other condition or illness.

27-20.11-6. Educational and other services provided to children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders.

Nothing in this section shall be construed to alter any obligation of a school district or the State of Rhode Island to provide services to an individual under an individualized family service plan or an individualized education program, as required under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or the provision of services to an individual under any other federal or state law. A health insurance carrier assessed for services provided under section 42-12-29, children's health account, shall not be required to provide duplicative coverage for the same beneficiary for the same or similar services mandated under this section.

27-20.11-7. Credentialing and contracting practices.

(a) Any individual providing applied behavior analysis treatment under this section shall be:

- (1) Individually licensed by the department of health as a health care provider/clinician pursuant to chapter 42-35 or 42-35-1 et al. and nationally certified as a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA); and credentialed by the insurer; or
 - (2) Individually nationally certified as a Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analyst (BCaBA) supervised by a Board Certified Behavior Analyst who is licensed by the department of health as a psychologist, social worker or therapist; and credentialed by the insurer.
- (b) Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to require a change in the credentialing or contracting practices of health insurers for mental health or substance abuse providers

The Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (MHPAEA) requires group health plans and health insurance issuers to ensure that financial requirements (such as co-pays, deductibles) and treatment limitations (such as visit limits) applicable to mental health or substance use disorder (MH/SUD) benefits are no more restrictive than the predominant requirements or limitations applied to substantially all medical/surgical benefits. MHPAEA supplements prior provisions under the Mental Health Parity Act of 1996 (MHPA), which required parity with respect to aggregate lifetime and annual dollar limits for mental health benefits. As a result of this act, the dollar limits in the state mandate are not applicable.

BCBSRI supports the best practices and principles guided by the Behavioral Analyst Certification Board. The administration and oversight of ABA plans is more intensive than plans administered through HBTS as ABA incorporates discrete trial teaching. Best Practices for ABA include a comprehensive team:

Applied behavioral analysis (ABA) is the process of systematically applying interventions based on learning theory and using them to improve socially important behaviors to a meaningful degree and to demonstrate that the interventions employed are responsible for the improvement. It is often used to treat children **with autism** or other PDDs. It involves the design, implementation, and evaluation of behavioral modification plans for the purpose of producing significant improvement in the identified behavior. With this type of treatment, problematic behaviors, the events leading up to them, and the consequences of those behaviors are identified.

Intensive behavioral intervention therapy involves highly structured techniques that are delivered by a therapist on a one-to-one basis. The objectives of treatment are to improve the child's social communication and social interaction skills, leading to the potential development of play and flexibility of behavior. The targeted behaviors addressed by behavioral analysis are often referred to as challenging behaviors. These behaviors may be due to: environmental factors, physical conditions, mental health disorders, adaptive functioning, and psychological factors. The severity and frequency of these behaviors may result in risk to the physical safety of the individual or others. These behaviors include but are not limited to: aggression, violence, destructiveness, and self-injury.

General ABA behavioral goals in autism include: increasing selected behaviors, teaching new skills, maintaining selected behaviors, generalizing or transferring selected behaviors, restricting or narrowing conditions under which interfering behaviors occur, and reducing interfering behaviors. Socially significant behaviors that are frequently targeted for maintaining or increasing to a meaningful degree include: reading, academics, social skills, communication and adaptive living skills (e.g., gross and fine motor skills, eating and food preparation, toileting, dressing, personal self-care, domestic skills, time and punctuality, money and value, home and community orientation and work skills).

CODING

Commercial Products

The following codes, when rendered by a certified ABA provider, are medically necessary when services is approved by BCBSRI Behavioral Health Vendor:

For certified ABA professional to assess:

H0031-32 Mental health assessment, by non-physician

For the certified ABA professional to create a treatment plan:
H0032-32 Mental health service plan development by non-physician

For the certified ABA professional to bill for direct services:
H2019-32 Therapeutic behavioral services, per 15 minutes

For the certified ABA professional to bill for supervised assistant services:
H2012-32 Behavioral health day treatment, per hour

For ABA groups sessions:
H2014-32 Skills training and development, per 15 minutes

The following Category III codes are not to be used and providers should file with an alternate HCPCS code noted above:

0359T Behavior identification assessment, by the physician or other qualified health care professional, face-to-face with patient and caregiver(s), includes administration of standardized and non-standardized tests, detailed behavioral history, patient observation and caregiver interview, interpretation of test results, discussion of findings and recommendations with the primary guardian(s)/caregiver(s), and preparation of report

0364T Adaptive behavior treatment by protocol, administered by technician, face-to-face with one patient; first 30 minutes of technician time

0365T Adaptive behavior treatment by protocol, administered by technician, face-to-face with one patient; each additional 30 minutes of technician time (list separately in addition to code for primary procedure)

0366T Group adaptive behavior treatment by protocol, administered by technician, face-to-face with two or more patients; first 30 minutes of technician time

0367T Group adaptive behavior treatment by protocol, administered by technician, face-to-face with two or more patients; each additional 30 minutes of technician time (list separately in addition to code for primary procedure)

0368T Adaptive behavior treatment with protocol modification administered by physician or other qualified health care professional with one patient; first 30 minutes of patient face-to-face time

0369T Adaptive behavior treatment with protocol modification administered by physician or other qualified health care professional with one patient; each additional 30 minutes of patient face-to-face time (list separately in addition to code for primary procedure)

0370T Family adaptive behavior treatment guidance, administered by physician or other qualified health care professional (without the patient present)

0371T Multiple-family group adaptive behavior treatment guidance, administered by physician or other qualified health care professional (without the patient present)

0372T Adaptive behavior treatment social skills group, administered by physician or other qualified health care professional face-to-face with multiple patients

0373T Exposure adaptive behavior treatment with protocol modification requiring two or more technicians for severe maladaptive behavior(s); first 60 minutes of technicians' time, face-to-face with patient

0374T Exposure adaptive behavior treatment with protocol modification requiring two or more technicians for severe maladaptive behavior(s); each additional 30 minutes of technicians' time face-to-face with patient (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)

RELATED POLICIES

Speech Therapy

Physical and Occupational Therapy

PUBLISHED

Provider Update, August 2015

Provider Update, October 2014

Provider Update, February 2014

Provider Update, December 2011

REFERENCES

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3. Eikeseth S. Outcome of comprehensive psycho-educational interventions for young children with autism. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*. 2009;30:158-78.
4. Matson JL, et al. Issues in the management of challenging behaviors of adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *CNS Drugs* 2011;25(7):597-606.
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6. Kovshoff H, et al. Two-year outcomes for children with autism after the cessation of early intensive behavioral intervention. *Behavior Modification* 2011;35:427-50.
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8. Virues-Ortega J. Applied behavior analytic intervention for Autism in early childhood: meta-analysis, meta-regression and dose-response meta-analysis of multiple outcomes. *Clinical Psychology Review* 2010;30:387-99. *Volkmar F, et al. Summary of the practice parameters for the assessment and treatment of children, adolescents and adults with autism and other pervasive developmental disorders. *Amer Acad Child Adolescent Psychiatry* 1999;38(12):1611-6.
9. <http://www.dol.gov/ebsa/mentalhealthparity/>
10. <http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/Statutes/TITLE27/27-20.11/INDEX.HTM>

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