

CalOptima Guidance for Behavioral Health Treatment (BHT) in Response to COVID-19 Pandemic (Updated January 14, 2021)

During this period of “stay at home” issued by the California governor, some families may choose to cancel Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) sessions to limit the risk of contracting COVID-19. For families who wish to continue ABA services, ABA providers should review their members’ needs and determine who may be able to pause services without experiencing detrimental effects.

CalOptima recommends ABA providers follow the ethics guidance published by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) which can be found here:

<https://www.bacb.com/bacb-covid-19-updates/>

Telehealth Option

Many ABA providers have inquired about a telehealth option during COVID-19. While CalOptima already reimburses Qualified Autism Services (QAS) providers and Board Certified Behavioral Analysts (BCBAs) for parent skill training and supervision via telehealth, we are making the following temporary revisions to telehealth requirements during the national health emergency to ensure ABA services can continue with minimal disruption.

- All ABA services can be delivered via telehealth, as clinically appropriate, taking into consideration the member’s functioning level and attending skills.
- Paraprofessionals and behavioral management assistants (BMAs) can provide ABA services via telehealth.
- ABA services provided via telehealth MUST be consistent with the current treatment plan.
- Providers MUST maintain necessary records and documentation for all ABA services.
- ABA providers MUST document in writing any barriers to service provision and steps taken for each member.

Authorization Request

CalOptima understands some of the limitations and difficulties in providing services and obtaining the necessary data/information required to request a new authorization. If services were provided, even if less than 50% of the hours were utilized, the provider should submit an updated treatment plan for re-authorization. The following options are available if the current authorization is within 30 days of expiration:

Option 1: Provider can request extension for an additional three months if unable to have sessions or unable to gather necessary elements missing from the treatment plan (e.g., vineland, coordination of care)

- Provider would need to submit a Behavioral Health Treatment Authorization Request form (BHT-ARF) along with a summary (less than one page) explaining why an extension is needed.
- This option will extend the duration of the authorization but will not add additional units to the current authorization.

Option 2: Provider can submit BHT-ARF to request a new 6-month authorization with completed information and data that reflect the billing during the reporting period.

The following option is available if authorization has expired or lapsed.

- If authorization has expired and no billing took place, submit most recent treatment plan with a short explanation of the late submission for a three-month authorization.

ABA support for distance learning:

- ABA services can overlap with distance learning if the conditions below are met:
 - All clinically appropriate ABA services provided via telehealth and during distance learning MUST take into consideration the child's functioning level and attending skills.
 - Providers MUST show evidence of coordination of care with the school.
 - ABA must focus on behavior modification rather than educational goals.
 - ABA provided via telehealth and during distance learning must be consistent with the current treatment plan.
 - ABA providers must document in writing any barriers to service provision and steps taken for each client.
 - Medically necessary BHT services provided in a school setting, including distance learning, must be clinically indicated as well as proportionate to the total BHT services received in home and community.

Per the APL, the following conditions would not be covered as BHT under Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment Program (EPSDT):

- Provision or coordination of respite, day care or educational services
- Custodial care primarily to maintain safety for member or anyone else