

## Effective Health Plan Management of ABA Programs: Data-Driven and Quality Indicators for Positive Treatment Outcomes

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Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is an evidence-based best practice treatment primarily used to help children with autism and other related developmental disorders. Services are supervised by a board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA) and can include board-certified assistant behavior analysts (BCaBAs), therapists and registered behavior technicians

(RBTs). Studies have shown that intensive and long-term ABA therapy (25-40 hours per week for 1-3 years) [can significantly improve treatment outcomes for most children](#).

Due to the intensity of this service, health plans are challenged with developing a monitoring system to assess the quality and appropriateness of ABA services being provided to children and their families. Effective ABA services are data-driven. Each step of the process, from assessment to treatment planning to daily service delivery, plays a vital role in the collection of valuable data and in determining positive outcomes and return on investment (ROI).

Monitoring of an ABA provider's billing and documentation practices can help identify potential areas for improvement in the collection of appropriate data and how this data is utilized by treatment providers. Successful ABA programs will include the following components:

- Establishment of an autism diagnosis by a qualified practitioner, such as a BCBA or physician
- A comprehensive assessment that includes a detailed family history, as well as psychological, behavioral, medical, developmental, educational and community functioning assessments
- Individualized treatment plans developed by a qualified professional that establish baseline measurements based upon the initial assessment

- Regular treatment plan reviews based on specific measures of progress related to language, communication and social skills, as well as adaptive functioning
- Progress notes that document observable, measurable progress towards the goals and objectives identified on the treatment plan
- Parent education and training as prescribed on the member's treatment plan

In addition, other quality indicators can be considered in evaluating the effectiveness of ABA programs. These indicators include, but are not limited to:

- Care coordination between behavioral and physical health care providers, including management of psychotropic medications as clinically indicated
- Ongoing coordination of treatment with community organizations outside of health care, such as schools and vocational rehabilitation centers
- Safety/crisis planning with member and family involvement
- Comprehensive infrastructure for staff supervision and oversight
- Documentation of services using the correct procedure code to support that the service billed is accurate and provided by appropriately credentialed staff

Health plan monitoring of ABA services is most effective when the process is implemented as a collaborative effort between the plan and its service providers. Provider engagement in the auditing process is crucial. Ongoing communication and education, as well as plan responsiveness to the identified needs of its members and providers, will result in positive outcomes for the health plan, providers, and most importantly, its members.

#### *References*

*Autism Speaks:*

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/applied-behavior-analysis-aba-autism-treatment>