



APPLIED BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS (ABA)

PURPOSE

Performance specifications are intended to enhance MassHealth Enrollee experience and outcomes by promoting transparency and consistency across Plans and providers. Performance specifications are expectations imposed on providers who contract for these specific and related services. Information contained in this document is based on publicly available documents, Plan expectations, your contract, and MassHealth guidance. This information should be and will look materially like any other MassHealth contracted Plan. Performance specifications, your provider manual, and other requirements can be found at providerexpress.com.

Providers contracted for this level of care or service are expected to comply with applicable regulations set forth in the Code of Massachusetts Regulations, and all requirements of these service-specific performance specifications. In addition, providers of all contracted services are held accountable to the General Performance Specifications. Where there are differences between the service-specific and General Performance Specifications, the service-specific specifications take precedence.

OVERVIEW

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a service that provides for the performance of behavioral assessments; interpretation of behavior analytic data; development of a highly specific treatment plan; supervision and coordination of interventions; and training other interveners to address specific objectives or performance goals in order to treat challenging behaviors that interfere with the youth's successful functioning. ABA includes services provided by two different sets of credentials; Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst and Behavior Technician/Paraprofessional. It is delivered by one or more members of a team of qualified providers consisting of professional and paraprofessional staff. Phone contact and consultation may be provided as part of the intervention.

Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst: This service includes a behavioral assessment (including observing the youth's behavior, antecedents of behaviors, and identification of motivators); development of a highly specific behavior treatment plan; supervision and coordination of interventions; and training other interveners to address specific behavioral objectives or performance goals. This service is designed to treat challenging behaviors that interfere with the child/youth's successful functioning. The Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst develops specific behavioral objectives and interventions that are designed to develop adaptive skills and diminish, extinguish, or improve specific behaviors related to the youth's behavioral health condition(s) and which are incorporated into the behavior management treatment plan and the risk management/safety plan.

Behavior Technician/Paraprofessional: This service includes implementation of the treatment plan, monitoring the youth's behavior, reinforcing implementation of the treatment plan by the parent(s)/guardian(s)/caregiver(s), and reporting to the Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst on implementation of the treatment plan and progress toward behavioral objectives or performance goals.

SERVICE COMPONENTS

1. Providers of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) are outpatient hospitals, community health centers, mental health centers, other clinics, and private agencies/individuals. ABA must be delivered by a provider with demonstrated infrastructure to support and ensure:
 - a) quality management/assurance;
 - b) utilization management;
 - c) electronic data collection/IT;
 - d) clinical or psychiatric expertise; and
 - e) cultural and linguistic competence.
2. The activities of Applied Behavior Analysis services include:
 - a. Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst
 - i. Functional Behavior Assessment: conducts descriptive and systematic behavioral assessments, including functional analyses, and provides behavior analytic interpretations of the results. In certain instances, in which a severe behavior is present, this may also involve a functional analysis for safe testing in a controlled environment.
 - ii. Documents observations of the youth in the home and community
 - iii. Designs and supervises behavior analytic interventions
 - iv. Conducts structured interviews with the youth, family, and any identified collaterals about his or her behaviors
 - v. Completes a written functional behavioral assessment
 - vi. Develops a focused treatment plan that identifies specific and measurable objectives or performance goals and interventions (e.g., skills training, reinforcement systems, removal of triggering stimuli, graduated exposure to triggering stimuli, etc.) that are designed to diminish, extinguish, or improve specific behaviors related to a youth's mental health conditions
 - vii. Develops specific objectives and interventions that are incorporated into the youth's new or existing risk management/safety plan
 - viii. Conducts parent training which must include at least two specific and measurable parent/guardian/caregiver treatment goals, and must include instruction for the parent/guardian/caregiver on how to implement strategies identified in the behavior management plan
 - ix. Works closely with the Behavior Technician/Paraprofessional to ensure the treatment plans and risk management/safety plans are implemented as developed and to make any necessary adjustments to the plan
 - x. Supervises the work of those who implement behavior analytic interventions

- xi. When medically necessary, may provide short-term specialized direct instruction to target novel or high-risk behaviors:
 - This requires prior authorization and review
 - Requires a clinical rationale and transition plan to fade treatment back to a behavior technician/paraprofessional
- b. Behavior Technician/Paraprofessional
 - i. Monitors the youth's progress on implementation of the goals of the treatment plan developed by the Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst
 - ii. Provides coaching, support, and guidance to the parent/guardian/caregiver in implementing the plan
 - iii. Collects data and conducting certain types of assessments (e.g., stimulus preference assessments)
 - iv. Works closely with the Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst to ensure the treatment plans and risk management/safety plan are implemented as developed and reports to the Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst if the youth is not achieving the goals and objectives set forth in the treatment plan, so that the Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst can modify the plan as necessary
 - v. Assists the youth in implementing the goals of the treatment plan developed by the Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst
 - vi. Directly implements skill-acquisition and behavior-reduction plans developed by the Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst
- 3. The ABA provider ensures that Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst staff provide adequate supervision to all paraprofessional staff and/or interns.
- 4. Supervision must be delivered to the Behavior Technician/Paraprofessional staff during instruction with the youth present as indicated below:
 - a) The hours approved are based on the staff's direct hours, i.e., a minimum of one hour of case supervision for every 10 hours of direct service.
- 5. The ABA provider develops and maintains policies and procedures relating to all components of ABA services. The agency will ensure that all new and existing staff will be trained on these policies and procedures.
- 6. The ABA provider delivers these services in the youth's home and community. In certain cases, clinic-based services may also be authorized.
- 7. The ABA provider works collaboratively with Intensive Care Coordination (ICC), In-Home Therapy (IHT), or other existing providers and delivers services in accordance with the youth's plan of care.

STAFFING REQUIREMENTS

- 1. This service is to be provided by a staff team, including a Licensed Applied Behavioral Analyst and Behavioral Technician/Paraprofessional unless clinically indicated otherwise.
- 2. The minimum staff qualifications for each are as follows.
 - a) Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst
 - i. Licensed as an Applied Behavior Analyst

- b) Behavioral Technician/Paraprofessional
 - i. Works under the direct supervision of a Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst meeting the above criteria;
 - ii. must be 18 years old; and
 - iii. must have either:
 - a high school diploma or a general education development (GED) and have 12 months experience working with persons with developmental disabilities, children, adolescents, transitional age youth, or families; or
 - an associate degree in either a human, social, or educational services discipline, or a degree or certification related to behavior management, from an accredited community college or educational institution and have six months experience working with persons with developmental disabilities, children, adolescents, transition age youth, or families; or
 - certification as a Registered Behavioral Technician (RBT) by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board and have three months experience working with persons with developmental disabilities, children, adolescents, transitional age youth, or families.
3. The provider ensures that Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst staff is trained in principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). The provider also ensures that all ABA staff completes training upon employment and annually thereafter, inclusive of the following topics:
 - a) overview of the clinical and psychosocial needs of the target population
 - b) systems of care principles and philosophy
 - c) ethnic, cultural, and linguistic considerations of the community
 - d) community resources and services
 - e) family-centered practice
 - f) behavior management coaching
 - g) social skills training
 - h) psychotropic medications and possible side effects
 - i) risk management/safety plans
 - j) crisis management
 - k) introduction to child-serving systems and processes (DCF, DYS, DMH, DDS, DESE, etc.)
 - l) basic Individualized Education Program (IEP) and special education information
 - m) managed care entities' performance specifications and medical necessity criteria
 - n) child/adolescent development including sexuality
 - o) conflict resolution
4. The ABA provider ensures that Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst staff provides adequate supervision to all Behavioral Technician/Paraprofessional staff and/or interns.
5. The ABA provider ensures that all staff has received a background record check.

SERVICE, COMMUNITY AND OTHER LINKAGES

1. The ABA provider works closely with the family and any existing providers (e.g., behavioral health, physical health, local education authority) to implement the goals and objectives.
2. The ABA provider participates in coordination of care with agencies about service/care planning and coordination, on behalf of, and with the family.

PROCESS SPECIFICATIONS

Assessment, Treatment Planning and Documentation

1. Once an initial authorization is approved the provider will, within 10 business days, offer a face-to-face interview with the family.
2. Fourteen (14) calendar days is the Medicaid standard for the timely provision for services established in accordance with 42 CFR 441.56(e). The 14-day standard begins from the time at which the family has been contacted after an authorization is given.
3. Providers will maintain a waitlist if they do not have capacity to seek authorization to conduct a functional behavioral assessment and initiate services within 10 calendar days of contact with the parent/caregiver.
 - a) If a youth is placed on a wait list, providers will offer caregivers contact information for alternative providers in the region who are accepting new clients; and
 - b) providers will refer the youth to his or her Managed Care Entity to request assistance in accessing care.
4. ABA services are provided in a clinically appropriate manner and focused on the youth's behavioral and functional outcomes as described in the treatment and discharge plans.
5. The Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst completes a written functional behavioral assessment and develops a highly specific treatment plan with clearly defined interventions and measurable goals and outcomes that are consistent with the concerns and goals identified by the referring provider and family.
6. For ongoing services, a concurrent review is required. When requesting services, the provider should coordinate the treatment plan with the youth's IEP or Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) as appropriate, and with appropriate consent/authorization, submits the IEP/IFSP.
7. The treatment plan is individualized. Objectives are measurable and tailored to the individual. Interventions emphasize the elimination of risk-related behaviors and generalization of skill and focus on the development of spontaneous social communication, adaptive skills, and appropriate behaviors, and include a focus that:
 - a) targets specific behaviors including frequency, rate, symptom intensity, duration;
 - b) incorporates objective baseline and quantifiable progress measures; and
 - c) describes detailed behavioral interventions, reinforcements, and strategies for generalization of skills beyond the ABA sessions.
8. Specific and measurable parent/caregiver goals for training and support are included in the treatment plan with documented plans that skills transfer to the parent/caregiver will occur.
9. The treatment plan should address some of the following domains as appropriate for the youth: cognitive functioning, safety skills, social skills, play and leisure skills, community integration, vocational skills, coping and tolerance skills, adaptive and self-help skills, language and

communication, attending and social referencing, and reduction of interfering or inappropriate behaviors.

10. For social skills group, delivered by a licensed professional (e.g., Behavior Analyst, Social Worker, Psychologist, Marriage and Family Therapist, or Mental Health Counselor), a structured social skills behavior plan is developed which addresses individual needs, documents the curriculum being used, and maintains treatment notes that indicates progress for that individual in a group setting.
11. There is documented active coordination of care with ICC, other current behavioral health providers, the Primary Care Physician/Clinician (PCP/PCC), and other services and state agencies. If coordination is not successful, the reasons are documented and efforts to coordinate care continue.
12. If the child requires ongoing ABA the Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst, in concert with the family, will determine if the child needs ABA.
13. Services shall be provided to the youth and family in the home/community. Providers may deliver services via a HIPAA-compliant telehealth platform at the family's request and if the service can be effectively delivered via telehealth. Services delivered through a telehealth platform must conform to all applicable standards of care. When providing services via telehealth, providers shall follow the current MassHealth and MCE guidelines regarding telehealth.
14. The ABA provider ensures that all services are provided in a professional manner, ensuring privacy, safety, and respecting the family's dignity and right of choice.
15. The Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst and Behavioral Technician/Paraprofessional document each contact in a progress report or notes in the provider's file for the youth.
16. The Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst gives his or her agency's after-hours emergency contact information and procedures to the parent/guardian/caregiver.

Discharge Planning and Documentation

1. A discharge planning meeting is scheduled whenever the authorized decision-maker decides that services are no longer desired and, along with the family, determines that the youth has met his or her goals and no longer needs the service, or the youth no longer meets the medical necessity criteria for ABA therapy.
2. There is documented active discharge planning from the beginning of treatment.
3. The reasons for discharge and all behavior management treatment and discharge plans are clearly documented in the record.
4. The Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst staff develops an up-to-date copy of the treatment plan, which is given to the parent/guardian/caregiver on the last date of service and to all current providers within seven days of the last date of service.
5. If an unplanned termination of services occurs, the provider makes every effort to contact the parent/guardian/caregiver to obtain their participation in ABA and to provide assistance for appropriate follow-up plans (e.g., schedule another appointment, facilitate a clinically appropriate service termination, or provide appropriate referrals). Such activity is documented in the record.

QUALITY MANAGEMENT

1. The provider will develop and maintain a quality management plan that is consistent with their contractual responsibilities to Optum, and which utilizes appropriate measures to monitor, measure, and improve the activities and services it provides.
2. A continuous quality improvement process is utilized and may include outcome measures and satisfaction surveys to measure and improve the quality of care and services delivered to Enrollees, including youth and their families.
3. Clinical outcomes data must be made available to Optum upon request and must be consistent with the performance specifications of this service.
4. Providers must report any adverse incidents and other reportable events that occur to the relevant authorities.