

ALAMEDA ALLIANCE FOR HEALTH

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and Behavioral Health Treatment (BHT) Services

Primary Care Provider Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Overview

Alameda Alliance for Health (Alliance) is committed to improving the whole person health care services that we provide for our members. To realize this goal, the Alliance brought mental health and autism services in-house on Saturday, April 1, 2023, and now we are actively working to improve access to behavioral health services. Autism services include access to the Comprehensive Diagnostic Evaluation (CDE) to determine if a child or youth has Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) as well as Behavioral Health Treatment (BHT) services including Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA).

Q: What is the Medi-Cal BHT Benefit?

A: Medi-Cal plans are responsible for providing medically necessary Behavioral Health Treatment (BHT), including Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services, to individuals under the age of 21 regardless of diagnosis. For more information, please refer to the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) All Plan Letter 19-014.

The Alliance manages this benefit, and all referrals should be submitted to the Alliance.

Q: What is the role of the Alliance Behavioral Health (BH) team?

A: The Alliance Behavioral Health (BH) team includes Board Certified Behavior Analysts® (BCBAs®) and behavioral health navigators. The BH team supports coordinating the member's care from the point of referral to direct treatment. The BH team will review prior authorization (PA) requests for BHT/ABA and coordinate care with primary care providers (PCPs), ABA providers, and members/members' families.

Q: What is the role of the PCP?

A: PCPs are responsible for screening members under the age of 21 and making appropriate referrals for medically necessary treatment based on the unique needs of each member.

Please see the figure below for guidance on the PCP's role with members who have behavioral excesses and/or deficits that can be addressed by BHT/ABA.

Scenario #1



You or a member's family suspects that the member has autism. The member has never had a psychological assessment to rule out autism, and there are behavioral health concerns, and you are unsure of what type of BHT the member may need (ABA or other types of BHT).



Next Steps: Referral for Diagnostic Evaluation

A diagnostic evaluation for autism is administered by a licensed psychologist. The assessment is conducted to rule out autism (evaluation of child/adolescent with indications from screening of possible autism but no formal diagnosis has been given).

The evaluation may include a parent/care-giver interview and testing in the following areas: cognition, development, language, and social interaction. It may yield a diagnosis of autism and provide recommendations as needed.



Provider Form

Complete the **Behavioral Health (BH) Care – Autism Evaluation, BHT/ABA Referral Form** and select: *Diagnostic Evaluation/ Psychological Assessment to rule out autism.*

Scenario #2



You determine that other behavioral health or mental health services may be medically necessary (you are not recommending ABA due to lack of supporting documentation or ABA is not clinically indicated).



Next Steps: Referral for Mental Health

Mental health services include all evidence-based services for treatment of mental and/or substance use disorders that may include depression, post-traumatic stress, anxiety disorders, phobias, ADHD, mood disorders, attachment disorders, and more.

Other common BHT may include individual and group counseling, medication, and other supportive services.

The Mental Health Assessment/Evaluation is conducted to rule out mental health diagnoses (evaluation of a child/adolescent with indications from screening of possible mental health diagnoses other than autism).



Provider Form

Complete the **Behavioral Health (BH) Care – Autism Evaluation, BHT/ABA Referral Form** and select: *Mental Health Assessment/Referral.*

Scenario #3



- a. You have conducted your own assessment/ screening, are familiar with ABA treatment, and deem that the member can benefit from ABA treatment.
- b. A licensed psychologist has diagnosed member with autism or another diagnosis, and you deem that a referral for ABA treatment is medically necessary.



Next Steps: Referral for ABA

ABA treatment is a specific type of BHT that addresses socially significant behaviors (e.g., maladaptive behaviors, social interactions, communication, and self-help skills) through the application of behavioral strategies. ABA was first implemented with individuals with autism and intellectual disability; therefore, empirical research has mostly been concentrated on efficacy with these populations.

The first step in starting ABA services is having a BCBA conduct a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA). The member must have a recommendation from a licensed physician or psychologist prior to the FBA approval.



Provider Form

Complete the **Behavioral Health (BH) Care – Autism Evaluation, BHT/ABA Referral Form** and select: *Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) Treatment*, and complete **Section 4: Evaluation/Referral Information**.

Ask the parent to call the Alliance Member Services Department to conduct the screening so we can obtain additional information regarding the member (e.g., member availability for services).

Q: Where can PCPs find the referral form for ABA treatment?

A: PCPs can request a referral by completing the Alliance Behavioral Health (BH) Care – Autism Evaluation, BHT/ABA Referral Form. The form is available on the Alliance website at www.alamedaalliance.org/providers/provider-forms.

Q: Where should PCPs submit completed referral forms?

A: Please fax the completed Alliance Behavioral Health (BH) Care – Autism Evaluation, BHT/ABA Referral Form along with all pertinent clinical documents to the Alliance Behavioral Health Department at **1.855.891.9163** or send it via a secure email to deptbhaba@alamedaalliance.org.

Q: What happens after a PCP refers a member to the Alliance for ABA treatment or Diagnostic Evaluation/Comprehensive Diagnostic Evaluation (CDE)?

A: Our BH team will review the completed request/referral form after it is received via fax or secure email.

Referral for Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)/Behavioral Health Treatment (BHT):

- If the referral is appropriate and meets the criteria, our BH team will contact the member's parent to obtain their availability for services and email our ABA providers to coordinate the referral.
- Once an ABA provider confirms their availability and capacity to accept the referral, the Alliance will authorize the Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)/initial ABA assessment.
- A notice of action (NOA) will be sent to the member, their assigned PCP, and the rendering provider. **Please Note:** The authorization for the FBA/initial assessment for ABA is typically approved for a two (2)-month duration.

Referral for a Comprehensive Diagnostic Evaluation (CDE) to determine the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD):

- Our team will authorize the CDE with our contracted providers. A notice of action will be sent to the member, their assigned PCP, and the rendering CDE provider. **Please Note:** Authorization for the CDE is typically approved for a six (6)-month duration.
- Once the CDE is completed by the rendering provider, the CDE provider will fax the assessment to the BH team for review. If ABA is recommended in the assessment, the BH team will proceed with the FBA referral process described above.

If more information is needed, our BH team will call the PCP office or the member's parent/caregiver to obtain additional information.

Q: What services will still be provided through the Regional Center of the East Bay (Regional Center)?

A: The Regional Center will continue to provide the services they have available, such as Early Start for children up to five (5) years of age.

If you or patients need more information regarding Regional Center services, please call:

Alameda County Office – Headquarters
Regional Center of the East Bay
500 Davis Street, Suite 100
San Leandro, CA 94577
Telephone: **1.510.618.6100**

You can also find more information on their website:

- www.rceb.org/?r3d=getting-started-with-us
- www.rceb.org/clients/am-i-eligible/

Mental Health Services

Q: How do PCPs refer Alliance members who may need mental health services?

A: PCPs may refer members for mental health services by completing the Alliance Behavioral Health (BH) Care Referral Request Form and sending the referral form by:

Fax: **1.855.891.9168**

Send secure email: **deptbhmentalhealth@alamedaalliance.org**

To view and download the Alliance Behavioral Health (BH) Care Referral Request Form, please visit the Alliance website at **www.alamedaalliance.org/providers/provider-forms**.

Q: Once a referral is submitted, will PCPs receive confirmation of receipt?

A: The Alliance currently authorizes all mental health referrals and provides members with Alliance network mental health provider information to schedule their initial appointment. We are updating our workflow to send a confirmation of receipt to the referring PCPs.

Q: Is a PCP referral required for members to receive mental health services?

A: No. PCP referrals are not required for mental health services. Alliance members can self-refer for outpatient mental health services and find a mental health provider using the online Alliance Provider Directory at **www.alamedaalliance.org/help/find-a-doctor**.

Alliance members may also call:

Alliance Member Services Department

Monday – Friday, 8 am – 5 pm

Phone Number: **1.510.747.4567**

Toll-Free: **1.877.932.2738**

People with hearing and speaking impairments (CRS/TTY): **711/1.800.735.2929**

Q: Are there any limitations on mental health services?

A: There are no maximum limitations for treatment. However, each authorization period is for 12 visits. After 12 visits, a coordination of care update must be submitted by the treating mental health provider. The mental health provider must complete the Mental Health Coordination of Care Treatment Form for ongoing treatment to ensure care coordination with co-treating providers.

Q: How can PCPs view a list of contracted mental health providers?

A: To view a list of contracted mental health providers, PCPs may use the online Alliance Provider Directory at **www.alamedaalliance.org/help/find-a-doctor**.

Q: Can PCPs refer Alliance members to Alameda County Behavioral Health (ACBH)?

A: PCPs can refer Alliance Medi-Cal members to Alameda County Behavioral Health (ACBH) if a higher level of care such as, intensive outpatient, residential or psychiatric hospitalization is needed. Alliance members may also call the Alliance Member Services Department to be screened for ACBH services. The Alliance can then connect the members with ACBH for services.

PCPs can refer the Alliance member to call:

Alliance Member Services Department

Monday – Friday, 8 am – 5 pm

Phone Number: **1.510.747.4567**

Toll-Free: **1.877.932.2738**

People with hearing and speaking impairments (CRS/TTY): **711/1.800.735.2929**

Q: What are examples of services provided by the Alliance versus ACBH?

A: Examples of services for Alliance Medi-Cal members who may need outpatient mental health services include:

- Individual psychotherapy, group psychotherapy, psychological testing, and/or psychiatric consultation.

Examples of services for members from ACBH may include:

- Intensive outpatient program (IOP)
- Partial hospitalization program (PHP)
- Inpatient mental health services
- Mental health services for a serious mental illness including outpatient psychotherapy, care management, and psychiatric services to manage psychotropic medications.

For Alliance **Group Care** members, all mental or behavioral health services would be provided directly by the Alliance.

Q: Who can PCPs contact if there are questions about the mental health or BHT benefit process?

A: For questions or more information, PCPs may contact:

Alliance Provider Services Department

Monday - Friday, 7:30 am – 5 pm

Phone Number: **1.510.747.4510**

Email: **providerservices@alamedaalliance.org**

