

Personalized, focused support for members with autism

A study in early 2020 based on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data shows that 25% of children with autism go undiagnosed. Communication and cultural barriers between parents and physicians – as well as anxiety about stigma – may be the cause. The study points out the need for better screening and other steps to reduce disparities.¹

Optum is breaking barriers in supporting members and families who are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Our history with dedicated autism/applied behavioral analysis (ABA) utilization and network management extends back to 2009. **Today, our network includes more than 10,300 ABA practices.**²

The size and quality of our network, along with our growing cache of clinical experience and historical data, have helped make us the market leader in autism/ASA services.

Through comprehensive practice management and auditing activities, we have optimized the performance of our ABA providers across areas, such as supporting the delivery of evidence-based practices, increasing adherence to medications and keeping up to date on other treatment modalities aimed at improving independent functioning with proven treatment outcomes.

Our informed decision-making and clinical strength – the hallmarks of our program – are generating positive outcomes.

Our Autism/ABA program results

- One-quarter to one-third of the children in our Autism/ABA program are demonstrating improvement, as measured by DSM-5 criteria.³ Our 2021 data indicates **31.2% communication improvement, 31.8% behavioral improvement and 28.3% social improvement.**
- In 2021, the average **treatment modification rate is nearly 27%**, based on the 6-month reviews we conduct for all autism/ABA cases. To evaluate progress and modify therapy hours, we look at several social, behavioral and communication domains.⁴



Advanced analytics help identify member needs and personalize care

The autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnosis is included in our proprietary algorithm. We look at patterns in claims data to help isolate acute clinical exacerbation, inappropriate medication management and ABA treatment overutilization. Our team of autism care advocates is notified of changes so they can reach out to members, as needed.

Because the impact of ASD on the entire family is significant, our Family Support Program includes advocates who help monitor all aspects of the individual's care delivery. They work with children, families, providers and other stakeholders, as well as help coordinate occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech therapy, when applicable.

Innovative approaches to support

Our proactive thought leadership in finding the newest and best ways to support autism/ABA is fueled by ongoing collaboration with industry experts, our ABA leadership team and our network providers. These efforts have resulted in advanced approaches for identifying autism/ABA and for serving members. Our differentiated approach includes:

- **Clinically derived rules and predictive modeling to identify members with ASD.** When we identify a need, we send an introductory outreach letter to the family, educating them on our portal's ASD condition center and explaining their benefits.
- **Collaboration between our Family Support Program and the ASD Utilization Management team.** Our advocates are highly engaging, helping to monitor and evaluate care delivery and support, including regular, highly individualized reviews at 6-month intervals for each member.⁵
- **Network criteria that help evaluate ABA providers.** In the absence of universal agreement on how to identify best-in-class ABA providers, Optum has created a rigorous evaluation process for providers within our network. Rather than apply a rating scale to our ABA providers, Optum defines qualifications that all our ABA providers must meet. Recruitment and credentialing fully aligns with requirements around qualifications and licensing that vary from state to state. Our clinicians are re-credentialed every 3 years.
- **A collaborative clinical review process with providers.** We identify and review any cases in which the level of treatment does not match the symptoms. When cases do not meet medical necessity, we involve psychologists or physicians with a specialty in autism to have more detailed clinical discussions with providers.
- **Online virtual visits.** The convenience of virtual visits extends access and helps support parents in implementing ABA strategies. Supervision of the behavior technician can also occur via virtual visit.

We continue to hone our autism/ABA therapy model to define appropriate indicators, intervals and data points for reviews, as well as constantly monitor and evaluate all aspects of care delivery and support in alignment with accepted, evidence-based best practices.

Sources

1. Wiggins LD, Durkin M, Esler A. Disparities in documented diagnoses of autism spectrum disorder based on demographic, individual and service factors. *Autism Research*. 2020; 13:464-473.
2. SURE Network Summary Dashboard, Commercial and UBH General Networks Q3 2022 (September 29, 2022 data); DuBois, October 7, 2022.
3. Based on clinicians' scores in three specific domains: communication, behavioral and social. We compare improvement shown between each member's first and most recent scores. Service dates January 1-September 1, 2019.
4. Ibid.
5. While authorizations are typically 6 months in length, we may shorten or lengthen this in some instances – with provider agreement.



The Optum ABA leadership team

More than a decade ago, Optum established a team of dedicated autism care advocates and network professionals. The leadership team, which has remained in place since that time, includes Debra Katz, MD, national medical director; Tiffany Hodges, PsyD, BCBA-D, national director of our Autism/ABA team; and Darlene Fitzpatrick, national director of ABA Network Contracting.

These leaders have continually honed our Autism/ABA program to define appropriate indicators, intervals and data points for reviews of practices and management, resulting in a well-established, successful model for treatment.

For more information, visit optum.com/behavioralhealth or contact your Optum representative.



optum.com

Optum is a registered trademark of Optum, Inc. in the U.S. and other jurisdictions. All other brand or product names are the property of their respective owners. Because we are continuously improving our products and services, Optum reserves the right to change specifications without prior notice. Optum is an equal opportunity employer.

© 2022 Optum, Inc. All rights reserved. WF8904308 12/22