

# Applied Behavior Analysis

Plan: AmeriHealth Caritas Louisiana

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Policy contains: Applied behavior analysis.

*AmeriHealth Caritas has developed clinical policies to assist with making coverage determinations. AmeriHealth Caritas' clinical policies are based on guidelines from established industry sources, such as the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), state regulatory agencies, the American Medical Association (AMA), medical specialty professional societies, and peer-reviewed professional literature. These clinical policies along with other sources, such as plan benefits and state and federal laws and regulatory requirements, including any state- or plan-specific definition of medically necessary, and the specific facts of the particular situation are considered, on a case by case basis, by AmeriHealth Caritas when making coverage determinations. In the event of conflict between this clinical policy and plan benefits and/or state or federal laws and/or regulatory requirements, the plan benefits and/or state and federal laws and/or regulatory requirements shall control. AmeriHealth Caritas' clinical policies are for informational purposes only and not intended as medical advice or to direct treatment. Physicians and other health care providers are solely responsible for the treatment decisions for their patients. AmeriHealth Caritas' clinical policies are reflective of evidence-based medicine at the time of review. As medical science evolves, AmeriHealth Caritas will update its clinical policies as necessary. AmeriHealth Caritas' clinical policies are not guarantees of payment.*

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## Policy statement

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AmeriHealth Caritas Louisiana-covered applied behavior analysis (ABA)-based therapy is the design, implementation, and evaluation of environmental modification using behavioral stimuli and consequences to produce socially significant improvement in human behavior, including the direct observation, measurement and functional analysis of the relations between environment and behavior. ABA-based therapy services teach skills through the use of behavioral observation and reinforcement, or prompting, to teach each step of targeted behavior. ABA-based therapy services are based on reliable evidence and are not experimental.

AmeriHealth Caritas Louisiana-covered ABA-based therapy must be:

- Medically necessary;
- Prior authorized by AmeriHealth Caritas Louisiana; and
- Delivered in accordance with the member's behavior treatment plan.

Services must be provided by, or under the supervision of, a behavior analyst who is currently licensed by the Louisiana Behavior Analyst Board, or a licensed psychologist or licensed medical psychologist, hereafter referred to as the *licensed professional*. Payment for services must be billed by the licensed professional.

Prior to requesting ABA services, the member must have documentation indicating medical necessity for the services through a completed comprehensive diagnostic evaluation (CDE) that has been performed by a qualified health care professional (QHCP).

NOTE: Medical necessity for ABA-based therapy services must be determined according to the provisions of the Louisiana Administrative Code (LAC), Title 50, Part I, Chapter 11.

A QHCP is defined as a:

- Pediatricians using the MCHAT-R/F, and clinical judgment may diagnosis and complete a CDE. For children who receive a high-risk score of  $\geq 8$  on the MCHAT-R/F, pediatricians can independently make a diagnosis of autism (if their clinical judgment concurs with this score). For children who receive a moderate risk score of 3 to 7 on the MCHAT-R/F, pediatricians can complete the MCHAT-R/F follow-up interview, and based on their confidence in their clinical judgment, either independently make a diagnosis of autism or refer to a subspecialist listed below for a diagnostic evaluation:
  - Pediatric Neurologist;
  - Developmental Pediatrician;
  - Psychologist (including a medical psychologist);
  - Psychiatrist (particularly Pediatric and Child Psychiatrist);
  - A pediatrician under a joint working agreement with an interdisciplinary team of providers who are qualified to diagnose developmental disabilities;
  - Nurse Practitioner practicing under the supervision of a Pediatric Neurologist Developmental Pediatrician, Psychologist, or Psychiatrist; or
  - Licensed individual, including Speech and Language Pathologist, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, or Licensed Professional Counselor, who meets the requirements of a QHCP when:
    - The individual's scope of practice includes differential diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder and comorbid disorders for the age and/or cognitive level of the member; and
    - The individual has at least two years of experience providing such diagnostic assessments and treatments or is being supervised by someone who is listed as a QHCP under 1-5 above; and
    - If the licensed individual is working under the supervision of a QHCP, the QHCP must sign off on the CDE as having reviewed the document and being in agreement with the diagnosis and recommendation.

The CDE must include at a minimum:

- A thorough clinical history with the informed parent/caregiver, inclusive of developmental and psychosocial history;
- Direct observation of the member, to include but not be limited to, assessment of current functioning in the areas of social and communicative behaviors and play or peer interactive behaviors;
- A review of available records;
- A valid *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, (DSM) V (or current edition) diagnosis;
- Justification/rationale for referral/non-referral for an ABA functional assessment and possible ABA services; and
- Recommendations for any additional treatment, care or services, specialty medical or behavioral referrals, specialty consultations, and/or any additional recommended standardized measures, labs or other diagnostic evaluations considered clinically appropriate and/or medically necessary.

When the results of the screening are borderline, or if there is any lack of clarity about the primary diagnosis, comorbid conditions or the medical necessity of services requested, the following categories of assessment should be included as components of the CDE and must be specific to the member's age and cognitive abilities:

- Autism specific assessments;
- Assessments of general psychopathology;
- Cognitive/developmental assessment; and
- Assessment of adaptive behavior.

## **Assessment and Treatment Plan Development**

The licensed professional supervising treatment is required to perform a functional assessment of the member utilizing the outcomes from the CDE, and develop a behavior treatment plan.

Services for "Behavior Identification Assessment" must be prior authorized by AmeriHealth Caritas Louisiana. Once services commence, additional assessments at a minimum shall occur every six months. The authorization period for such assessments shall not exceed 180 days.

In exceptional circumstances, at the discretion of AmeriHealth Caritas Louisiana prior authorizing the service, an additional assessment may be authorized.

The behavior identification supporting assessment must be prior authorized. Supporting assessments may be approved to allow technicians to gather information that support the licensed professional completing the assessment. The authorization period for such assessments shall not exceed 180 days.

Behavior identification supporting assessment conducted with two or more technicians, must be prior authorized and treated in the same manner as the behavior identification supporting assessment above. However, such assessment may be administered by the physician or other QHCP who is on-site but not necessarily face-to-face; with the assistance of two or more technicians. This is only medically necessary when the member's behavior is so destructive that it requires the presence of a team and an environment customizable to the member's behavior.

All three assessment services can occur on the same day and continue as prior authorized until the assessment is completed.

## **Behavior Treatment Plan**

The behavior treatment plan identifies the treatment goals along with providing instructions to increase or decrease the targeted behaviors. Treatment goals and instructions target a broad range of skill areas such as communication, sociability, self-care, play and leisure, motor development and academic, and must be developmentally appropriate. Treatment goals should emphasize skills required for both short- and long-term goals. Behavior treatment plans should include parent/caregiver training and support. The instructions should break down the desired skills into manageable steps that can be taught from the simplest to more complex.

The behavior treatment plan must:

- Be person-centered and based upon individualized goals;

- Delineate the frequency of baseline behaviors and the treatment development plan to address the behaviors;
- Identify long-term, intermediate, and short-term goals and objectives that are behaviorally defined;
- Identify the criteria that will be used to measure achievement of behavior objectives;
- Clearly identify the schedule of services planned and the individual providers responsible for delivering the services;
- Include care coordination, involving the parent(s) or caregiver(s), school, state disability programs, and others as applicable;
- Include parent/caregiver training, support, education, and participation;
- Identify objectives that are specific, measurable, based upon clinical observations of the outcome measurement assessment, and tailored to the member; and
- Ensure that interventions are consistent with ABA techniques.

The provider may use the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) treatment plan template provided or his/her own form. If the provider chooses to use his/her own form, the provider must address ALL of the relevant information specified in the LDH treatment plan template. Any missing information may delay approval of prior authorization of service.

The behavior treatment plan must indicate that direct observation occurred and describe what happened during the direct observation. If there are behaviors being reported that did not occur and these behaviors are being addressed in the behavior treatment plan, indicate all situations and frequencies at which these behaviors have occurred and have been documented. If there is documentation from another source, that documentation must be attached. If there is any other evidence of the behaviors observed during the direct observation and that are proof of these behaviors, these must be reported on the behavior treatment plan as well.

The behavior treatment plan shall include a weekly schedule detailing the number of expected hours per week and the location for the requested ABA services. In addition, the provider shall indicate both the intensity and frequency of the therapy being requested and the justification for this level of service.

The location of service should be specific and indicate whether services are provided at home, clinic, school, camp, etc. If the place of service changes during the prior authorization period, an addendum to the behavior treatment plan must be submitted. The treatment plan should detail the ABA programming delivered in each location.

The behavior treatment plan shall include the name and contact information of the member's Primary Care Physician (PCP)/ Pediatrician and shall be sent to the pediatrician via fax, electronic medical records (EMR) or by mail.

When developing a treatment plan, it is necessary to request only services that are medically necessary as determined through the assessment. Any model of ABA services can be approved if it achieves the goals set forth in the assessment. All services do not need to be part of the treatment plan, or used in conjunction with each other, unless technician services are being provided. If technician services are being provided, supervision by a licensed behavior analyst must be a part of the treatment plan.

### **Therapeutic Behavioral Services**

Therapeutic behavioral services include the design, implementation and evaluation of environmental modification using behavioral stimuli and consequences to produce socially significant improvement in human behavior, including the direct observation, measurement and functional analysis of the relations between environment and behavior. This includes one-on-one services that teach skills for each step of targeted behavior(s) through the use of behavioral observation and reinforcement, or prompting.

The licensed supervising professional must frequently review the member's progress using ongoing objective measurement and adjust the instructions and goals in the behavior treatment plan as needed.

## **Supervision**

The licensed supervising professional shall provide case oversight and management of the treatment team by supervising and consulting with the member's team. The licensed supervising professional must also conduct regular meetings with family members to plan ahead, review the member's progress and make any necessary adjustments to the behavior treatment plan. Part of the supervision must be done in the presence of the member receiving treatment and state-certified assistant behavior analyst or the registered line technician. Supervision shall be approved on a 2:10 basis; that is two hours of supervision for every ten hours of therapy. Supervision will not be approved if the licensed supervising professional is delivering the direct therapy.

One on one supervision may be conducted and billed simultaneously and concurrently with one on one therapeutic behavioral services. Supervision can only occur when a non-licensed professional is providing the therapeutic behavioral services.

The licensed supervising professional should supervise no more than 24 technicians a day. More technicians may be supervised if a Certified Assistant Behavior Analysis (CaBA) is part of the professional support team or depending on the mix of needs in the supervisor's caseload. The licensed professional can supervise no more than 10 CaBAs.

## **Role of the Parent/Caregiver**

To facilitate ABA service authorization and delivery, the parent/caregiver should provide supporting documentation (e.g., Individualized Education Program [IEP]) as requested by the provider.

Treatment plan services must include care coordination involving the member's parent/caregiver. Services should also include parent/caregiver training, support, and participation. ABA is a member-focused service, and it is not practical or within the standard of practice to require the parent/caregiver to be present at all times while services are being rendered to the member. Members may be unaccompanied by a parent/caregiver while receiving services at a center-based program, especially for members receiving services for multiple hours per day. To the extent that parental/caregiver presence is required is a therapeutic decision, even when therapy is provided in the home.

Services for "Family adaptive behavior treatment guidance", administered by a physician or other QHCP, should be included in a behavior treatment plan for prior authorization in order to transfer skills to the parent(s) or caregiver(s) of the member to ensure that the member has consistency across environments, and therapy can be reinforced at home and in other locations with their parent/caregiver.

Services for “Multiple-family group adaptive behavior treatment guidance”, administered by a physician or other QHCP, should be included in a behavior treatment plan for prior authorization in order to transfer skills to the parent(s) or caregiver(s) of the member to ensure that the member has consistency across environments, and therapy can be reinforced at home and in other locations with their parent/caregiver.

The multiple-family group therapy should be used when parent(s) or caregiver(s) of two or more members are present. The members should have similar diagnosis, behaviors, and treatment needs.

### **Limitations**

A prior authorization period shall not exceed 180 days. Services provided without prior authorization will not be considered for reimbursement, except in the case of retroactive AmeriHealth Caritas Louisiana eligibility.

### **Group Therapy**

When part of the approved behavior treatment plan, services for “Adaptive behavior treatment social skills group” administered by physician or other QHCP shall be face-to-face with two or more members. The members should have similar diagnosis, behaviors, and treatment needs.

When part of the approved behavior treatment plan, “Registered Line Tech Group adaptive behavior treatment” may be administered by a registered line technician. This shall be face-to-face with two or more members. The members should have similar diagnosis, behaviors, and treatment needs.

### **Place of Service**

Services must be provided in a natural setting (e.g., home and community-based settings, including clinics and school). Medically necessary ABA services provided by ABA service providers in school settings are allowed.

### **Telehealth Requirements for Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)**

AmeriHealth Caritas will reimburse the use of telehealth, when appropriate, for rendering certain ABA services for the care of patients or to support the caregivers of members.

Telehealth requires prior authorization for services. Subsequent assessments and behavior treatment plans can be performed remotely via telehealth only if the same standard of care can be met.

Previously approved prior authorizations can be amended to increase units of care and/or to reflect re-assessment goals.

The codes listed below can be performed via telehealth; however, requirements for reimbursement are otherwise unchanged from Section 4.5 – Reimbursement of this manual chapter.

Relevant CPT codes include: 97151, 97152, 97153, 97154, 97155, 97156, 97157, 97158.

### **Guidance for Telehealth ABA**

Telehealth services must be based on ABA methodology and rendered or directed by a registered line technician (RLT), licensed behavior analyst (LBA), or certified assistant behavior analyst (CaBA). The caregivers/patients and RLT/LBA/CaBA must be linked through an interactive audio/visual telecommunications system.

## Supervision

Telehealth supervision of in-home therapy rendered by a RLT must utilize a LBA/CaBA to provide remote supervision. Each RLT must obtain ongoing supervision as approved in the patient's plan of care. Supervision may be conducted via telehealth in lieu of the LBA/CaBA being physically present. The purpose of supervision is to improve and maintain the behavior analytic, professional, and ethical repertoires of the RLT, and facilitate and maintain the delivery of high-quality services to his or her patients.

## Exclusions

The following services do not meet medical necessity criteria, and do not qualify as AmeriHealth Caritas Louisiana-covered ABA-based therapy services:

- Therapy services rendered when measurable functional improvement or continued clinical benefit is not expected, and therapy is not necessary or expected for maintenance of function or to prevent deterioration;
- Service that is primarily educational in nature;
- Services delivered outside of the school setting that duplicate services under an individualized family service plan (IFSP) or an IEP, as required under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA);
- Treatment whose purpose is vocationally- or recreationally-based;
- Custodial care that:
  - Is provided primarily to assist in the activities of daily living (ADLs), such as bathing, dressing, eating, and maintaining personal hygiene and safety;
  - Is provided primarily for maintaining the safety of the member or anyone else; or
  - Could be provided by persons without professional skills or training.

## Member Requirements

Applied behavior analysis (ABA)-based services are available to AmeriHealth Caritas Louisiana members under 21 years of age who:

- Exhibit the presence of excesses and/or deficits of behaviors that significantly interfere with home or community activities (e.g., aggression, self-injury, elopement, etc.);
- Have been diagnosed with a condition for which ABA-based therapy services are recognized as therapeutically appropriate, including autism spectrum disorder, by a qualified health care professional;
- Had a comprehensive diagnostic evaluation by a qualified health care professional; and
- Have a prescription for ABA-based therapy services ordered by a qualified health care professional.

**NOTE:** All of the above criteria must be met to receive ABA-based services. If there is a recommendation in the comprehensive diagnostic evaluation (CDE) for ABA therapy, a separate prescription is not needed.

Coordination of care

The Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) shall coordinate care with the member's Primary Care Physician (PCP). Written progress notes shall be sent to the PCP either electronically (EMR), faxed or mailed every six months to coordinate with request for the renewal of ABA services. The PCP shall be copied on all behavior treatment plans. The PCPs name and contact information must appear on all Behavior Treatment Plans.

In order to help the managed care organizations (MCOs) understand all the services a member needs and is receiving, the provider shall enclose the Behavior Treatment Plan and a copy of the child's individualized educational plan (IEP), if accessible. If the provider does not enclose the IEP, the provider must explain why they are unable to furnish a copy of the IEP.

A behavior treatment plan that requires services to be delivered in a school setting will not be approved until an IEP is provided to the member's MCO. Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy recommended in an IEP and delivered by the Local Education Authority is eligible for reimbursement from Louisiana Medicaid, provided all other conditions for coverage of ABA therapy are met (e.g., the service is medically necessary).

The IEP serves as the addendum if the member receives ABA services in a school setting.

The behavior treatment plan must specify whether the member is enrolled in a waiver and identify the specific waiver the member is in. (This information is available by checking the Medicaid Eligibility Verification System (MEVS)/ Recipient Eligibility Verification System (REVS) system.) If the child is in a waiver, the treatment plan must include a copy of the Plan Profile Table and the Schedule page from the certified plan of care (POC). This is obtained by contacting the Waiver Support Coordinator. Communication shall be maintained between the ABA provider and the Waiver Support Coordinator.

ABA and waiver services can overlap depending on the service description in the waiver document and the need for the services to overlap. This should be clearly documented in an addendum to the behavior treatment plan.

This addendum must detail the frequency and duration of sessions when the ABA provider and the direct support worker (DSW) are required to be present at the same time, and include an outline of information the DSW needs to correctly implement the skill, several measurable and objective goals defining and leading to the DSW's competency (i.e., correct implementation), and the methods for collecting data on the direct support worker's performance. Strategies the ABA provider will use should be identified.

These strategies include, but not limited to:

- Demonstration;
- Modeling;
- Coaching and feedback; and
- Providing repeated opportunities for DSW practice (role playing and in "real life" situations with the member).

This pairing of the DSW and the ABA provider should be specific, time limited, measurable and individualized.

Non-applied behavior analysis facility

A non-ABA facility is any location other than the member's home that does not offer ABA as one of its primary services.

For ABA services to be provided at a non-ABA facility or simultaneously with another service, if allowed per medically unlikely edits and coding guidelines, the other service in question must not have a restriction that keeps it from being performed at the same time as another service.

For services at a non-ABA facility, the addendum must detail why sessions are medically necessary at this facility and how often the services will occur at the facility. They must also explain why the sessions cannot occur in the home or at the ABA facility.

This addendum must detail the frequency and duration of sessions when the ABA provider and the other service provider are required to be present at the same time, and include an outline of information the other service provider needs to correctly implement the skill. It also must include several measurable and objective goals defining and leading to the DSW's competency (i.e., correct implementation) and the methods for collecting data on the DSW's performance.

Strategies the ABA provider will use must be identified, including, but not limited to:

- Demonstration;
- Modeling;
- Coaching and feedback; and
- Providing repeated opportunities for DSW practice (role playing and in "real life" situations with the member).

This pairing of the DSW and the ABA provider should be specific, time limited, measurable and individualized.

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## References

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Louisiana Department of Health. 2014. Behavioral Health Services Provider Manual. Applied Behavior Analysis. Chapter 4, Section 4.1. Covered services. Issued 02/14/2025~~04/22/2024~~.

Louisiana Department of Health. 2014. Behavioral Health Services Provider Manual. Applied Behavior Analysis. Chapter 4, Section 4.2. Beneficiary requirements. Issued 01/20/2022.

Louisiana Department of Health. 2014. Behavioral Health Services Provider Manual. Applied Behavior Analysis. Section 4.6. Coordination of care requirements. Issued 02/14/2025.

Louisiana Department of Health. Informational Bulletin 25-9. Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Manual Updates. Dated March 18, 2025.

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## Policy updates

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