

New Medicaid Adaptive Skill Building service definition!

Until recently behavioral health and allied health providers have found it difficult to provide intensive applied behavioral analysis for young children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Over the past decade, we have made substantial gains in identifying children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) at younger and younger ages. Now it is not uncommon to identify children with ASD as early as 18 months old. The problem is that despite the substantial gains in early diagnosis, New Mexico has not had a system in place to provide intensive applied behavioral analysis (ABA). ABA is the treatment of choice and has been shown to be highly effective at treating children with ASD.

Two recent changes are going to have a substantial effect on the treatment of children who have ASD. **In the last legislative session, the New Mexico legislature passed a new law that requires insurers to cover up to \$36,000 a year for treatments and therapies for children until age nineteen, or age twenty-two if the individual is enrolled in high school.** It also sets a maximum lifetime coverage limit of \$200,000. The only problem with the law is that it allows coverage to be subject to other general exclusions and limitations of the insurer's policy or plan. In other words the New Mexico Autism Insurance Law allows large "self-insured" agencies or companies to opt out of the ASD coverage. Based on this exception many large employers have opted out of the ASD coverage (e.g., State of New Mexico employees, employees of the Public Education Department, most Federal employees, and other large businesses). It is estimated that the Autism Law covers an approximately 20% of those families who have private insurance. However, it remains a viable option for those families' whose employer has not opted out of the coverage.

The second major change that will greatly impact our ability to provide evidence-based practices to young children with ASD is a NEW service definition that the HSD/MAD of New Mexico added to Medicaid. Very few providers are aware of this new service definition. The new Medicaid service definition allows providers to implement applied behavioral analysis (ABA) to children diagnosed with Autistic Disorder and who are younger than the age of 5 years. **ONLY** children diagnosed with Autistic Disorder (299.00) are eligible for the Adaptive Skill Building services through OptumHealth. Providers must be an approved Adaptive Skill Building provider (Medicaid provider type 132). These approved behavioral health providers can provide up to 15 hours of applied behavioral analysis services to a child and their family, and these ABA services can be provided in the child's home and community. Given the need for a comprehensive treatments and a medical home, Adaptive Skill Providers will communicate the treatment plan with the child's Primary Care Physician and other community providers (e.g., early intervention programs, therapists, and preschools).

As of November 1, 2010, Jennifer Chavez, HSD/MAD stated there are two providers enrolled: Jumpstart and Pacific Child and Families Associates. However, she has talked with other potential providers and expects more to be enrolled soon. Thanks to Dr. Brian R. Lopez, PhD, JumpStart, for contributing the information in this article. If you have any further questions, you can contact him directly at brlopez@msn.com or 505/828-3837