INTRODUCTION TO NEW DIRECTIONS’ ADOPTED CLINICAL PRACTICE GUIDELINE CONCERNING BEHAVIORAL THERAPIES FOR THE TREATMENT OF AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

New Directions Behavioral Health® (New Directions) offers a full range of behavioral health solutions. The members we serve have a wide range of mental health diagnoses, including Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). With over 7,000 members who have been diagnosed with ASD, we are committed to offer guidance to providers so they can align with evidence-based practice guidelines. See Table 1 for prevalence. Our goal is to improve clinical effectiveness and provide members with the best care possible.

ASD is a medical, neurobiological, developmental disorder, characterized by three core deficit areas: social interactions, social communication, and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior. Benefit coverage for behavioral therapies to treat symptoms of ASD is driven by individual state mandates.

New Directions manages Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) benefits for various health plans. ABA is the behavioral treatment approach most commonly used for children with ASD. Health plans for which New Directions currently administers the ASD benefit may consider ABA to be experimental/investigational and, therefore, a non-covered service without a controlling state mandate. Techniques based on ABA include discrete trial training, Incidental teaching, pivotal response training, and verbal behavioral intervention.

ABA involves a structured environment, predictable routines, individualized treatment, transition and aftercare planning, and significant family involvement. The therapy focuses on developing skills related to behavioral deficits and reducing behavioral excesses. Behavioral deficits may occur in the areas of communication, social and adaptive skills, though can exist in other areas as well. Examples of deficits may include lack of expressive language, inability to request items or actions, limited eye contact with others, and inability to engage in age-appropriate self-help skills such as tooth-brushing or dressing. Examples of behavioral excesses may include, but are not limited to, physical aggression, property destruction, elopement, self-stimulatory behavior, self-injurious behavior, and vocal stereotypy.

New Directions adopted Therapies for Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder: Behavioral Interventions Update/ Executive Summary, published in August 2014 by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, as a Clinical Practice Guideline (CPG) for ASD. A link is included below.
The prevalence of ASD among children is thought to be around 1.5 percent, but varies widely by region of the country, sex and race/ethnicity. The rate is historically higher among males (2.3 percent) than females (0.5 percent). It is estimated that the total lifetime societal cost of caring for and treating a person with ASD in the United States is $3.2 million.

Table 1: New Directions prevalence rate for members by age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Bands</th>
<th>Autism Primary Diagnosis</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>851</td>
<td>241,968</td>
<td>0.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>2,130</td>
<td>323,911</td>
<td>0.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-21</td>
<td>3,453</td>
<td>994,102</td>
<td>0.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22+</td>
<td>1,036</td>
<td>5,394,949</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7,470</td>
<td>6,954,930</td>
<td>0.11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Source: Claims Data, 7/2015 to 6/2016, Includes Membership from 5 Major Health Plans

New Directions’ Autism Resource Program manages the benefits for ABA therapies. The Program’s comprehensive array of services include utilization management and care coordination provided by a team of Board Certified Behavior Analysts, provider and community outreach, and metrics and reporting. The program’s leadership is comprised of licensed and experienced clinicians, including medical doctors with specialty designations in psychiatry, licensed clinical social workers, Board Certified Behavior Analysts®, and certified case managers. The program is overseen by a New Directions Medical Director and the Clinical Director of Corporate Projects. The program is administered by a centralized unit using well-defined evidence-based ASD Medical Policies that incorporates treatment guidelines grounded in clinical research. For further information, please contact the Autism Resource Program at 877-563-9347.

New Directions Case Management program assists members with ASD by promoting continuity of care and engaging members and their families to take an active role in developing a plan of care for the member. Case management assists members in accessing needed services, including the Autism Resource Program, and coordinates referrals to providers, community resources, and caregivers. These services improve member resiliency, self-management, and self-care. New Directions’ Case Management program is accredited by URAC® and the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA®).

Literature Citations:

Links For Families/Caregivers:


Adopted: 06-2017