New Directions Behavioral Health® (New Directions) offers a full range of behavioral health solutions, and our members have a wide range of mental health diagnoses, including members who have been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). With over 7,000 members who have ASD as a diagnosis (Table 1), we are committed to provide guidance to providers to align with evidence-based practice guidelines to promote members receiving the best care possible, thus reaching the best possible outcome.

New Directions manages Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), a behavioral therapy for ASD, benefits for various health plans. ASD is a medical, neurobiological, developmental disorder, characterized by three core deficit areas which include 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. 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. ABA is the behavioral treatment approach most commonly used for children with ASD. 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. ABA 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, however, are possible 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 has adopted ASD as a Clinical Practice Guideline (CGP). This document titled Therapies for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Behavioral Interventions Update/Executive Summary, was published in August of 2014 by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) (a link is included below). The AHRQ documents are intended to provide guidance to providers concerning evidenced based behavioral therapy treatments for members diagnosed with Autism, and enhance compliance with best practice treatments for members with a diagnosis of ASD.

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</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>

New Directions has developed the Autism Resource Program to manage the benefits for ABA therapies. New Directions’ Autism Resource Program provides a comprehensive approach for the management of the benefits for ABA therapies. 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 guided by a centrally administered, well-defined and evidence-based ASD Medical Policy 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 (CM) program assists members with ASD in promoting continuity of care and engaging members and their families to take an active role in developing a care plan 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’ CM program is accredited by both URAC® and the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA).

LINKS and REFERENCES

Therapies for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Behavioral Interventions Update, Effective Health Care Program, Comparative Effectiveness Review #137

There is the full report, and a shorter executive summary.


For families/caregivers


The information in this guide comes from the reports, Comparative Effectiveness of Therapies for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Therapies for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Behavioral Interventions Update. The reports were produced by the Vanderbilt Evidence-based Practice Center with funds from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). For a copy of the reports, or for more information about AHRQ and the Effective Health Care Program, go to www.effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/autism1.cfm this summary guide was prepared by the John M. Eisenberg Center for Clinical Decisions and Communications Science at Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, TX. It was reviewed by parents and caregivers of children with ASD. It was updated in 2014 by researchers at AHRQ.