

Behavioral Health Treatment for Autism



Medi-Cal plans are responsible for providing Behavioral Health Therapy (BHT) services to individuals under the age of 21 who have an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and children for whom a licensed doctor or psychologist determines that BHT services are medically necessary, regardless of diagnosis.

The **San Francisco Health Plan's** Behavioral Health Benefits Manager, **Carelon Behavioral Health**, manages this benefit for beneficiaries. Please refer any beneficiaries who meet the eligibility criteria to Carelon at 855-371-8117.

ROLE OF PRIMARY CARE

Often a pediatrician, physician or child-adolescent psychologist will make the initial diagnosis if excesses and/or deficits of behaviors that significantly interfere with home or community activities are detected.

These can include: poor understanding of social relationships, significant language and communication problems, high need for sameness and predictability, impaired thinking abilities, organizational problems, and uneven patterns of development. The role of the PCP is particularly important in securing an ASD diagnosis and recommendation for treatment, as well as providing medical follow-up for commonly co-occurring medical disorders that complicate treatment.

HOW CARELON CAN HELP

1. Medi-Cal beneficiaries are eligible for coordination of behavioral health services. Carelon, in partnership with participating health plans will help coordinate these services by offering support and guidance to pediatricians/primary care physicians serving members with Behavioral Health needs.
2. Primary Care Physicians (PCPs) can gain access to consultation and coordination services conveniently through any of our existing systems, including directly calling the designated health plan Customer Service line, submitting by fax a simple referral form or contacting our care managers integrated within the primary health plan case management team.
3. PCPs can access a variety of services for patients with behavioral health needs, including psychiatric consultations for treatment decisions, outpatient BH referral and access, assessment and triage for patients at risk, care management, BHT for ASD and psychological evaluations for prescreening of medical procedures.
4. Carelon will manage and coordinate service for these Medi-Cal beneficiaries. All requests and referrals for behavioral health services can be submitted to Carelon or beneficiaries can be directed to contact Carelon's Customer Service Department at 855-371-8117.

SCREENING FOR AUTISM

It is recommended that ALL children receive screening for ASD at the 18 and 24-month well-child visit.

Screening can identify children with developmental and behavioral challenges early, when they may benefit most from intervention. There are multiple screening tools that can be used for ASD, including:

- Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ)
- Communication and Symbolic Behavior Scales (CSBS)
- Screening Tool for Autism in Toddlers and Young Children (STAT)
- Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers—Revised, with Follow-up (M-CHAT-R/F)

Developed by researches supported by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the M-CHAT-R/F is one of the most used tools. It is a free, two-step screening tool to be used at regular well-child checkups. With the M-CHAT-R/F, healthcare providers can classify a child's risk of having autism as low, medium, or high on the basis of parents' answers to 20 questions.

The checklist makes it possible to detect autism earlier. This is very important because earlier intervention can help improve outcomes for children on the spectrum. If a child has a score in the high-risk range, it will warrant a referral for further evaluation. A medium-risk result includes a follow-up questionnaire.

Researchers at the NIH found that a smaller proportion of children received a medium- or high-risk assessment with this version than with earlier versions of the checklist. Of all children whom the test determined were at risk for ASD after the M-CHAT follow-up, 95 percent were diagnosed with a developmental delay or concern about development, including more than 47 percent with an ASD diagnosis.

You can download the free tool in multiple languages at: <https://mchatscreen.com/>



Carelon Behavioral Health

Connect to a counselor or get help with other mental health needs. You can call 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

(855) 371.8117

TTY: (800) 735-2929