



IEHP UM Subcommittee Approved Authorization Guideline			
Guideline	Criteria for Multidisciplinary Diagnostic Treatment	Guideline #	UM BH 06
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Section	Behavioral Health	Revision Date	6/11/2025
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COVERAGE POLICY

“Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) refers to any one of a group of disorders with an onset typically occurring during the preschool years and characterized by difficulties with social communication and social interaction along with restricted and repetitive patterns in behaviors, interests, and activities. According to the latest figures from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 1 in 36 children in the U.S. have ASD. Psychologists can play an important role diagnosing ASD and helping people cope with and manage the challenges associated with the disorder. (APA, 2024)”

IEHP Members are eligible to receive diagnostic services under Early Periodic Screening Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) if services are medically necessary. Under California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) All Plan Letter 23-010, “In accordance with federal EPSDT requirements, Medi-Cal provides coverage for all Medically Necessary BHT services for eligible beneficiaries under 21 years of age. This includes children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and children for whom a licensed physician, surgeon, or psychologist determines that BHT services for the treatment of ASD are Medically Necessary, regardless of diagnosis.”

COVERAGE LIMITATIONS AND EXCLUSIONS

Members may be referred to IEHP for an Autism Evaluation by a licensed physician or a behavioral health provider.

IEHP offers two types of diagnostic evaluations when autism is suspected for a Member under the age of 21.

1. Center of Excellence

- A. Components of an Autism Assessment at one of our Centers of Excellence (COE) include:
 - i. A parent/guardian interview; and
 - ii. Direct play observation; and
 - iii. Review of relevant medical, psychological, and/or school records; and
 - iv. Cognitive/developmental assessment; and
 - v. Measure of adaptive functioning; and
 - vi. Language assessment (by a speech language pathologist); and
 - vii. Sensory evaluation (by an occupational therapist); and

- viii. If indicated, neurological and/or genetic assessment to rule out biological issues (by a developmental pediatrician, pediatric neurologist, and/or geneticist).
- ix. Diagnoses
- x. Treatment recommendations

B. The following requirements must be met for a Member to be assessed at a COE:

- 1. Underlying neurologic diagnosis such as seizures; or
- 2. History of physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse and/or neglect; or
- 3. Behavioral health diagnosis.

4. Autism Evaluation

A. An Autism Evaluation includes:

- i. Norm-referenced psychological tests; and
- ii. Informal tests and surveys; and
- iii. Interview information; and
- iv. School and medical records; and
- v. Medical evaluation; and
- vi. Observational data; and
- vii. Diagnoses; and
- viii. Treatment Recommendations

5. Based on the presented findings, IEHP uses the above-mentioned criteria when determining if a Member requires an assessment at a Center of Excellence as opposed to an Autism Evaluation. Consideration will be taken to ensure time and distance requirements are met if one assessment and not the other is offered closer to the Member's home. It is important to note, regardless of which level of diagnostic service is authorized, the Member will receive approval for a diagnostic assessment once medical necessity is established.

4. After an assessment is completed, repeat assessments may be authorized when medical necessity is established.

CLINICAL/REGULATORY RESOURCE

DHCS/Medi-Cal Provider Manual- as above.

Apollo does not speak to Autism Diagnostics.

MCG Guidelines does not speak to Autism Diagnostics.

Discussion with Provider

In consultation with a network provider not affiliated with the process, it was reported that a single, well-trained Licensed Psychologist can assess and diagnose autism. More specifically a multi-disciplinary team is not medically necessary.

Comparative Studies

In 2018 Hayes, Ford, Rafeeqe, and Russell conducted a literature review of several reputable databases (Cochrane library, US National Guidelines Clearinghouse, etc.) for clinical practices around the diagnosis of Autism. Over 20 articles were found and analyzed. It was found that

multidisciplinary approaches were ideal, but a singular experienced healthcare professional was enough.

In 2000, The American Academy of Neurology published an article on the diagnostics of Autism and found stated that “a clinician experienced in the diagnosis and treatment of autism is usually necessary for accurate and appropriate diagnosis.” Therefore, this demonstrates a single clinician as opposed to a team can diagnose autism.

In 2010 Missouri released best practice guidelines. In the guidelines they discussed that a single lead clinician may assess and diagnose Autism but is also trained to be aware when input from other professionals is needed. They proposed a tiered approach, stating a multidisciplinary approach is not required for accurate diagnosis in all cases and can actually delay the diagnosis, especially when availability of specialists is limited.

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