

## Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) Performance Specifications

These performance specifications apply to the following Tufts Health Plan products:

- Tufts Health Plan Commercial (including Tufts Health Freedom Plan)<sup>1</sup>
- Tufts Medicare Preferred HMO (a Medicare Advantage product)<sup>2</sup>
- Tufts Health Plan Senior Care Options (SCO) (a dual-eligible product)<sup>2</sup>

These performance specifications apply to the following Tufts Health Public Plans products:

- Tufts Health Direct (a Massachusetts Qualified Health Plan (QHP) (a commercial product)
- Tufts Health Together (a MassHealth MCO Plan and Accountable Care Partnership Plans)
- Tufts Health RITogether (a Rhode Island Medicaid Plan)
- Tufts Health Unify (OneCare Plan; a dual-eligible product)

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Providers contracted for this level of care or service will be expected to comply with applicable regulations set forth in the Code of Massachusetts Regulations and all requirements of these service-specific performance specifications in addition to the General Behavioral Health Performance specifications. All Performance Specifications are located online at [tuftshealthplan.com](http://tuftshealthplan.com) in the Provider Resource Center.

### DEFINITIONS

**Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)** is a service that provides for the performance of behavioral assessments; interpretation of behavior analytic data; development of a highly specific treatment plan; supervision and coordination of interventions; and training other interveners to address specific objectives or performance goals in order to treat challenging behaviors that interfere with the youth's successful functioning. ABA includes services provided by two different sets of credentials; Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst and behavior technician/paraprofessional. It is delivered by one or more members of a team of qualified providers consisting of professional and paraprofessional staff. Phone contact and consultation may be provided as part of the intervention.

**Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst:** This service includes a behavioral assessment (including observing the youth's behavior, antecedents of behaviors, and identification of motivators); development of a highly specific behavior treatment plan; supervision and coordination of interventions; and training other interveners to address specific behavioral objectives or performance goals. This service is designed to treat challenging behaviors that interfere with the child/youth's successful functioning. The Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst develops specific behavioral objectives and interventions that are designed to develop adaptive skills and diminish, extinguish, or improve specific behaviors related to the youth's behavioral health condition(s) and which are incorporated into the behavior management treatment plan and the risk management/safety plan.

**Behavior Technician/Paraprofessional:** This service includes implementation of the treatment plan, monitoring the youth's behavior, reinforcing implementation of the treatment plan by the parent(s)/guardian(s)/caregiver(s), and reporting to the Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst on implementation of the treatment plan and progress toward behavioral objectives or performance goals.

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<sup>1</sup> Commercial products include HMO, POS, PPO, Tufts Health Freedom Plan, and CareLink<sup>SM</sup> when Tufts Health Plan is the primary administrator.

<sup>2</sup> Tufts Medicare Preferred and Tufts Health Plan SCO are collectively referred to in this payment policy as Senior Products.

## COMPONENTS OF SERVICE

1. Providers of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) are outpatient hospitals, community health centers, mental health centers, other clinics, and private agencies/individuals. ABA must be delivered by a provider with demonstrated infrastructure to support and ensure:
  - i. quality management/assurance;
  - ii. utilization management;
  - iii. electronic data collection/IT;
  - iv. clinical or psychiatric expertise; and
  - v. cultural and linguistic competence.

2. The activities of Applied Behavior Analysis Services include:

### **Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst**

- i. Functional Behavioral Assessment — conducts descriptive and systematic behavioral assessments, including functional analyses, and provides behavior analytic interpretations of the results. In certain instances in which a severe behavior is present, this may also involve a functional analysis for safe testing in a controlled environment.
- ii. Documents observations of the youth in the home and community
- iii. Designs and supervises behavior analytic interventions
- iv. Conducts structured interviews with the youth, family, and any identified collaterals about his or her behavior(s)
- v. Completes a written functional behavioral assessment
- vi. Develops a focused treatment plan that identifies specific and measurable objectives or performance goals and interventions (e.g., skills training, reinforcement systems, removal of triggering stimuli, graduated exposure to triggering stimuli, etc.) that are designed to diminish, extinguish, or improve specific behaviors related to a youth's mental health condition(s)
- vii. Develops specific objectives and interventions that are incorporated into the youth's new or existing risk management/safety plan
- viii. Parent training must occur and include at least 2 specific and measurable parent/guardian/caregiver treatment goals and provides instruction for the parent/guardian/caregiver on how to implement strategies identified in the behavior management plan
- ix. Works closely with the behavior technician/paraprofessional to ensure the treatment plans and risk management/safety plan are implemented as developed and to make any necessary adjustments to the plan
- x. Supervises the work of those who implement behavior analytic interventions

### **Behavior Technician/Paraprofessional**

- i. Monitors the youth's progress on implementation of the goals of the treatment plan developed by the Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst
  - ii. Provides coaching, support, and guidance to the parent/guardian/caregiver in implementing the plan
  - iii. Collects data and conducting certain types of assessments (e.g., stimulus preference assessments)
  - iv. Works closely with the Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst to ensure the treatment plans and risk management/safety plan are implemented as developed, and reports to the licensed applied behavioral analyst if the youth is not achieving the goals and objectives set forth in the treatment plan so that the Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst can modify the plan as necessary
  - v. Assists the youth in implementing the goals of the treatment plan developed by the Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst
  - vi. Directly implements skill-acquisition and behavior-reduction plans developed by the Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst
3. The ABA provider ensures that Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst staff provides adequate supervision to all paraprofessional staff and/or interns.
  4. Supervision must be delivered to the behavior technician/paraprofessional level staff during instruction with the member present as indicated below:
    - i. The hours approved are based on the Member's direct hours, i.e., a minimum of one hour of case supervision for every 10 hours of direct service.

5. The ABA provider develops and maintains policies and procedures relating to all components of ABA services. The agency will ensure that all new and existing staff will be trained on these policies and procedures.
6. The ABA provider delivers these services in the youth's home and community. In certain cases, clinic-based services may also be authorized.
7. The ABA provider works collaboratively with Intensive Care Coordination (ICC), In-Home Therapy Services (IHT), or other existing providers and delivers services in accordance with the youth's plan of care.

### **STAFFING REQUIREMENTS**

This service is to be provided by a staff team, including a licensed applied behavioral analyst and paraprofessional unless clinically indicated otherwise. The **minimum** staff qualifications for each are as follows:

**Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst:** Licensed as an applied behavior analyst.

#### **Behavioral Technician/Paraprofessional**

1. Works under the direct supervision of a Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst meeting the above criteria and
  - i. must be 18 years old, and
  - ii. must have either
    - a. a high school diploma or a general education development (GED), and have 12 months experience working with persons with developmental disabilities, children, adolescents, transition age youth and families; or
    - b. an associate's degree in either a human, social, or educational services discipline, or a degree or certification related to behavior management, from an accredited community college or educational institution, and have six months experience working with persons with developmental disabilities and children/adolescents/transition age youth and families.
    - c. a certification as a Registered Behavioral Technician (RBT) by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board and have 3 months experience working with persons with developmental disabilities/and children/adolescents/transition age youth and families.
2. The provider ensures that licensed applied behavior analysis staff is trained in principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). The provider also ensures that all ABA staff completes training, upon employment and annually thereafter, inclusive of the following topics:
  - overview of the clinical and psychosocial needs of the target population
  - systems of care principles and philosophy
  - ethnic, cultural, and linguistic considerations of the community
  - community resources and services
  - family-centered practice
  - behavior management coaching
  - social skills training
  - psychotropic medications and possible side effects
  - risk management/safety plans
  - crisis management
  - introduction to child-serving systems and processes (DCF, DYS, DMH, DDS, DESE, etc.)
  - basic IEP and special education information
  - managed care entities' performance specifications and medical necessity criteria
  - child/adolescent development including sexuality
  - conflict resolution
3. The ABA provider ensures that Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst staff provides adequate supervision to all paraprofessional staff and/or interns.
4. The ABA provider ensures that all staff has received a background record check (BRC).

### **SERVICE, COMMUNITY AND COLLATERAL LINKAGES**

1. The ABA provider works closely with the family and any existing providers (i.e., behavioral health, physical health, local education authority) to implement the goals and objectives.
2. The ABA provider participates in coordination of care with agencies with regard to service/care planning and coordination, on behalf of, and with, the family.

## **QUALITY MANAGEMENT (QM)**

The ABA provider participates in quality management activities that include fidelity monitoring and attends meetings as required.

## **PROCESS SPECIFICATIONS**

### **Treatment Planning and Documentation**

1. Once an initial authorization is approved, the provider will, within ten business days, offer a face-to-face interview with the family.
2. Fourteen calendar days is the Medicaid standard for the timely provision for services established in accordance with 42 CFR 441.56(e). The 14-day standard begins from the time at which the family has been contacted after an authorization is given.
3. Providers will maintain a waitlist if they do not have capacity to seek authorization to conduct a functional behavioral assessment and initiate services within ten calendar days of contact with the parent/caregiver.
4. If a member is placed on a wait list providers will offer caregivers contact information for alternative providers in the region who are accepting new clients; and
5. Providers will refer the member to their Managed Care Entity to request assistance in accessing care.
6. ABA services are provided in a clinically appropriate manner and focused on the youth's behavioral and functional outcomes as described in the treatment and discharge plans.
7. The Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst completes a written functional behavioral assessment and develops a highly specific treatment plan with clearly defined interventions and measurable goals and outcomes that are consistent with the concerns and goals identified by the referring provider and family.
8. For ongoing services, a concurrent review is required. When requesting services the provider should coordinate the treatment plan with the member's Individualized Education Program/Individualized Family Service Plan as appropriate and, with appropriate consent/authorization, submits the IEP/IFSP.
9. The treatment plan is individualized. Objectives are measurable and tailored to the individual. Interventions emphasize the elimination of risk-related behaviors and generalization of skill and focus on the development of spontaneous social communication, adaptive skills, and appropriate behaviors and include a focus that:
  - i. targets specific behaviors (including frequency, rate, symptom intensity, duration);
  - ii. incorporates objective baseline and quantifiable progress measures; and
  - iii. describes detailed behavioral interventions, reinforcers, and strategies for generalization of skills beyond the ABA sessions.
10. Specific and measurable Parent/caregiver goals for training and support are included in the treatment plan with documented plans that skills transfer to the parent/caregiver will occur.
11. The treatment plan should address some of the following domains as appropriate for the child: cognitive functioning, safety skills, social skills, play and leisure skills, community integration, vocational skills, coping and tolerance skills, adaptive and self-help skills, language and communication, attending and social referencing, and reduction of interfering or inappropriate behaviors.
12. For social skills group, delivered by a Licensed Professional including Behavior Analyst, Social Worker, Psychologist, Marriage and Family Therapist, or Mental Health Counselor develops a structured social skills behavior plan which addresses individual needs, documents the curriculum being used and maintains treatment notes that indicates progress for that individual in a group setting.
13. There is documented active coordination of care with ICC, other current behavioral health providers, the primary care physician/clinician (PCP/PCC), and other services and state agencies. If coordination is not successful, the reasons are documented, and efforts to coordinate care continue.
14. If the youth requires ongoing ABA, in concert with the family, the Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst will determine if the youth needs ABA.
15. The ABA provider ensures that all services are provided in a professional manner, ensuring privacy, safety, and respecting the family's dignity and right of choice.
16. The Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst and behavioral technician/paraprofessional document each contact in a progress report or notes in the provider's file for the youth.

17. The Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst gives his or her agency's after-hours emergency contact information and procedures to the parent/guardian/caregiver.

### **Discharge Planning and Documentation**

A discharge planning meeting is scheduled whenever the authorized decision-maker decides that services are no longer desired and, along with the family, determines that the youth has met his or her goals and no longer needs the service, or the youth no longer meets the medical necessity criteria for ABA therapy.

1. There is documented active discharge planning from the beginning of treatment.
2. The reasons for discharge and all behavior management treatment and discharge plans are clearly documented in the record.
3. The Licensed Applied Behavior Analyst staff develops an up-to-date copy of the treatment plan, which is given to the parent/guardian/caregiver on the last date of service and to all current providers within seven days of the last date of service.

If an unplanned termination of services occurs, the provider makes every effort to contact the parent/guardian/caregiver to obtain their participation in ABA and to provide assistance for appropriate follow-up plans (i.e., schedule another appointment, facilitate a clinically appropriate service termination, or provide appropriate referrals). Such activity is documented in the record.

### **DOCUMENT HISTORY**

- July 2020: Template updates