

Autism Benefit to Include Applied Behavior Analysis Beginning January 1, 2016

Beginning January 1, 2016, Columbia University will offer coverage for precertified Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) therapy. ABA therapy is one of the most common and most evidence-based methods used to treat children diagnosed by qualified, licensed practitioners with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

What is Applied Behavioral Analysis?

ABA therapy is especially useful in teaching behaviors to children with Autism who do not otherwise develop these behaviors on their own. ABA therapy typically consists of intensive therapy that can last anywhere from a few months to as long as a few years. Most of the time, ABA therapy is done in the child's home.

ABA is the design, implementation and evaluation of environmental modifications using behavioral stimuli and consequences to produce socially significant improvement in human behavior, including the use of direct observation, measurement and functional analysis of the relationship between environment and behavior.

Services must be performed by a Board Certified Behavioral Analyst (BCBA), subject to medical necessity and management.

A typical ABA treatment plan may include the following services with an eligible provider:

Physical Therapy	Current Columbia University Medical Plan Coverage
Occupational Therapy	
Chiropractic Therapy	
Skills Training (e.g., activities of daily living, social and coping)	New Enhancements Beginning 1/1/2016: In-Network, PreCertified Therapies Covered by Columbia Medical Plan
Behavioral Therapy (e.g., family, group, individual)	
Consultative Services (e.g., agencies, community services)	

The benefits are provided under Columbia's medical plan options at the in-network, outpatient, mental health rate and may be subject to deductibles and coinsurance. This specific benefit is offered in addition to medical coverage for Developmental Delay conditions.

How is treatment determined?

Treatment must meet all Plan criteria for coverage, including preauthorization of initial and ongoing services and a treatment plan developed by a Board Certified Behavioral Analyst (BCBA) who directly supervises the qualified paraprofessional administering the care.

A team of UnitedHealthcare (UHC) Behavioral Care Advocates can help answer your questions. Trained in developmental disorders, ABA and coordination of therapeutic services in a pediatric setting, Advocates can assist families dealing with autism to use benefits. They also ensure that services meet guidelines for benefits eligibility and quality.

How do I learn more about ABA therapy services?

Call UHC to speak with a Behavioral Care Advocate. Your Advocate will support you and help you get answers. Treatment requires precertification, which includes provider eligibility verification and treatment plan review.

Your Board Certified Behavioral Analyst (“Advocate”) will help you start the approval process and provide an explanation of benefits covered. Talk to your child’s diagnosing provider—such as a pediatrician and/or psychologist— to see if ABA therapy is appropriate. They can help answer questions and are generally familiar with the precertification process that UHC has in place.

As a UHC member, you can learn more about the ABA program via Optum Health's, UHC's behavioral health division, behavioral health access line: 888-265-9945. Outreach referrals can also be received from providers, Columbia’s Human Resources department, medical care management staff and Humana, our EAP vendor.

How do I have my child precertified?

Treatment requires precertification, which includes provider eligibility verification and treatment plan review. However, precertification is typically taken care of by your provider. Call your Advocate to get started and for help locating eligible providers. Once you receive approval, your provider will typically recertify services with UHC at a minimum of every six months by sending an updated treatment plan.

To assist you when discussing this new benefit and the applicable precertification requirements, the following documents are typically required to process requests for ABA therapy for children with a diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder:

- **Diagnostic Report** – You may be asked for copies of all psychological, neuropsychological and developmental assessments or physician diagnosis that has already been completed related to the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- **Treatment Plan** – Your provider will submit a copy of the child’s individualized treatment plan. This will be needed prior to receiving approval for therapy.

How do I determine if I am currently using an eligible provider?

If you’re enrolled in the Columbia University Medical Plan, call UnitedHealthcare. Eligible in-network providers include:

- Providers who have met established qualifications of a Board-Certified Behavioral Analyst
- Clinically licensed mental health clinicians with a Doctorate or Master’s degree that are trained to treat Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Providers who perform services under the direct supervision of “eligible” providers (e.g., therapy assistants)

If you are currently seeing a provider that is not in-network with your medical plan, Advocates can help identify and navigate your potential options.