



# TRICARE® Autism Care Demonstration (ACD)

US Family Health Plan Training for ABA  
Providers

# Introduction to ACD

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- Purpose
  - The Autism Care Demonstration (ACD) under TRICARE offers ABA services to eligible TRICARE beneficiaries with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It aims to evaluate the effectiveness of ABA services, improve access, and establish provider standards.
- Duration
  - Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) services have been part of TRICARE benefits since 2001. The current ACD has been in effect since 2014 and will expire on December 31, 2028, unless extended by Congress.

# Training Objectives

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By the end of this training, ABA providers should:

- Understand TRICARE's Autism Care Demonstration (ACD) guidelines and service models.
- Implement proper documentation and coordination practices.
- Recognize the tiered-delivery model and provider qualifications.
- Navigate reimbursement processes and exclusion criteria.
- Maintain current certifications, background checks, and insurance coverage.
- Stay informed through mandatory training and updates on regulatory requirements.

# TRICARE Program Manuals

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- The US Family Health Plan is contracted with the Defense Health Agency to administer the Autism Care Demonstration benefits in accordance with TRICARE's Program Manuals.
  - [TRICARE Operations Manual 6010.62-M](#)
  - [TRICARE Policy Manual 6010.63-M](#)
  - [TRICARE Reimbursement Manual 6010.64-M](#)
  - [TRICARE Systems Manual 7950.4-M](#)

# Beneficiary Eligibility

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- The US Family Health Plan can only authorize ABA services under TRICARE's Autism Care Demonstration when beneficiaries meet **at least one** of the following qualifications:
  - A dependent of an Active Duty service member enrolled in US Family Health Plan & Registered for the Extended Care Health Option (ECHO) program
  - a RETIREE/RETIREE family member enrolled in TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select
  - covered under the Transitional Assistance Management Program
  - covered under TRICARE For Life
  - a participant in TRICARE Young Adult
  - a participant in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or Partnership for Peace
  - no longer TRICARE-eligible, but participates in the Continued Health Care Benefits Program

The Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) is essential for military families seeking TRICARE's Extended Care Health Option (ECHO), which provides additional benefits like ABA therapy for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Enrollment in EFMP is required to access ECHO services, offering support and coordination for families with special needs.

# Diagnostic Eligibility

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- Eligible beneficiaries must have an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (F84.0) diagnosis by a TRICARE-authorized primary care manager (PCM) or specialized ASD-diagnosing provider.
  - Diagnosis occurs under the TRICARE basic benefit. TRICARE beneficiaries nominated for the ACD must have their TRICARE-authorized ASD-diagnosing and referring provider submit either a referral or diagnostic evaluation stating a diagnosis of ASD using DSM-5 criteria to initiate the process for enrollment into the ACD.
- Diagnostic Requirements:
  - A referral or diagnostic evaluation indicating an ASD diagnosis
  - The date of the initial ASD diagnosis
  - A completed DSM-5 Diagnostic Checklist
  - Complete results of an approved validated assessment tool.

# Valid Assessment Tools

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TRICARE requires that the most current version of specific Validated Assessment Tools (VATs) be used for diagnosing Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). A general observation interview alone is not considered a valid diagnostic tool within TRICARE's guidelines for ASD diagnosis in the context of ABA.

TRICARE mandates that these tools be administered by licensed or certified professionals who meet the program's specific requirements for ASD diagnosis and ABA service provision.

## **Tools recognized and required by TRICARE for ABA services and ASD diagnosis:**

- Screening Tool for Autism in Toddlers and Young Children (STAT)
- Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule-Second Edition (ADOS-2)
- Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised (ADI-R)
- Childhood Autism Rating Scale-Second Edition (CARS2)
- Gilliam Autism Rate Scale, Third Edition (GARS-3)
  - Note: Completion of the GARS alone is not sufficient for diagnostic documentation. An approved ASD diagnosing/referring provider must submit a diagnostic evaluation in addition to the GARS.

**Exceptions to VAT Requirements:** For beneficiaries younger than age 12 months, the authorized ASD diagnosing/referring provider may choose an appropriate age-based tool to complete the VAT requirement.

The US Family Health Plan may accept the diagnosis through source verification, on a case-by-case basis, if the diagnosis was made by a provider who is not TRICARE authorized, but would be otherwise eligible as an authorized TRICARE ASD diagnosing provider and the diagnosis meets the requirements set forth.

# Service Delivery Models

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- ABA Providers should choose the service model that best suits the individual beneficiary's needs.
- **Sole Provider Model:**  
A single ABA supervisor manages all services.
- **Tiered Delivery Model:**  
Supervised Behavior Technicians (RBTs, ABAT, or BCAT) provides services under the supervision of an authorized ABA supervisor.

# ABA Services Covered by ACD

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- Direct ABA Services:
  - 97151 Behavior Identification Assessment
  - 97153 Adaptive Behavior Treatment
  - 97155 Protocol Modification
  - 97156 Family Guidance
  - 97157 Multiple Family Guidance
  - 97158 Group Adaptive Treatment

# Relevant Services Covered by Basic Benefits

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While TRICARE's Autism Care Demonstration specifically covers ABA therapies for autism, the broader TRICARE Basic benefits also include relevant services to support the comprehensive care needs of beneficiaries, such as:

- Diagnosis & Related Services
- Includes medical team conferences
- Outpatient Therapy: OT, PT, SLP Services
- Pharmacotherapies
- Psychotherapies
- Psychological testing
- Respite care

# Provider Qualifications

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- **Authorized ABA Supervisors**
  - Must hold a master's degree or higher in a relevant field, be state-licensed, and/or certified by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB).
- **Assistant Behavior Analysts**
  - Bachelor's degree and appropriate state licensure or BACB/QABA certification. Must work under a qualified ABA supervisor.
- **Behavior Technicians (RBT, ABAT, BCAT)**
  - Certification such as Registered Behavioral Technicians (RBT), Applied Behavioral Analyst (ABAT), or Behavioral Certified Autism Technician (BCAT), must operate under direct supervision of an authorized ABA supervisor.

# Provider Requirements

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- CPR/BLS Certification
  - Complete and maintain Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation and Basic Life Support certification through approved courses.
- Criminal History Background Check
  - Providers with felony convictions or crimes against children are ineligible.
    - Supervisors: Provide a Criminal History Review.
    - Assistants and BTs: Provide a comprehensive background check including Federal, State, and County reports for the last 10 years.
- ACSPs and Sole Providers:
  - Liability Insurance: Maintain insurance of \$1 million per claim and \$3 million in aggregate.

# Assessment & Progress Documentation Requirements

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- Initial Assessments & Treatment Plans (TPs)
  - ABA supervisors must complete initial assessments using CPT code 97151.
  - Assessments during the initial assessment includes the required outcome measures: PDDBI, Vineland 3, Social Responsive Scale 2, and the Parental Stress Index (PSI4) or the Stress Index for Parent of Adolescent (SIPA).
- Six-Month Progress Reviews
  - Providers must update treatment plans every six months, documenting progress on behavior targets, adjusting goals, and conducting outcome measures as required. See next page for outcome measures and timeline.

# Outcome Measures & Reassessments

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- ABA providers are required to complete and submit the following Outcome Measures:

## **Every Six Months:**

Parenting Stress Index (PSI)

Stress Index for Parents of  
Adolescents (SIPA)

Pervasive Developmental Disorder  
Behavior Inventory (PDDDBI)

## **Annually:**

- Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales (Vineland)
- Social Responsiveness Scale (SRS)

# Involvement and Discharge Documentation Requirements

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- **Parent/Caregiver Involvement**
  - Mandatory: Six parent/caregiver training sessions are required every six months to teach treatment protocols.
- **Progress Evaluation**
  - Document progress or lack of progress during each six-month reassessment and revise treatment plans accordingly.
- **Discharge Planning**
  - Discharge criteria include meeting ABA goals or lack of measurable progress after several assessments.
  - If the ACSP/Sole Provider terminates services with any beneficiary for any reason, the ACSP/Sole Provider must notify the contractor a minimum of 45 calendar days prior to termination.

# Coordination & Integration of Services

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- Collaboration with Other Providers
  - ABA providers should coordinate care with other healthcare services such as OT, PT, and SLP.
- Comprehensive Care Plan (CCP)
  - Ensure ABA services are documented in the CCP and aligned with other therapies or treatment goals.

# Authorization & Claims

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- Referral Process
  - Initial Referrals: Must include a complete assessment, level of support needed, and diagnosis of ASD.
  - Reauthorizations: Submit at least 30 days before the authorization expires, with progress reports and updated outcome measures.
- Claim Submissions
  - All claims must be submitted electronically, and proper HIPAA taxonomy codes (e.g., Behavior Analyst, Assistant Behavior Analyst) must be used.
  - All claims must have the ABA providers valid NPI.

# Exclusions

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- Non-reimbursable Services / Not Covered by TRICARE:
  - BT training
  - Non-ABA services
  - Travel time (Unless Authorized)
  - Academic services/School-Based ABA
  - Services provided by family members
  - Services rendered by a non-authorized ABA provider

# Compliance and Quality Monitoring

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- **Audit Requirements**
  - Contractors will audit provider records annually and monitor compliance with documentation and billing practices.
- **Billing & Reimbursement**
  - Providers must adhere to the specified rates for each CPT code, ensuring claims match authorized service units.
- **Fraud Prevention**
  - Contractors monitor for high-dollar claims, inconsistent billing, and potential fraud. Providers with irregularities may face recoupment or additional monitoring.

# Core Resources for ABA Providers

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## **Autism Speaks**

[www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org)

Autism awareness, funding, and information. Toolkits for providers and families.

## **Autism Science Foundation**

[www.autismsciencefoundation.org](http://www.autismsciencefoundation.org)

Provides funding for research, supports evidence-based practices, and scientific developments related to autism and ABA.

## **The Autistic Self Advocacy Network {ASAN}**

[www.autisticadvocacy.org](http://www.autisticadvocacy.org)

Advocacy and self-advocacy resources created by and for autistic individuals, offering valuable perspectives on autism that can help providers understand neurodiversity and promote respectful, inclusive practices.

## **Behavior Analyst Certification Board {BACB}**

[www.bacb.com](http://www.bacb.com)

Guidelines, professional development resources, and updates on ethical standards in behavior analysis.

## **Autism Society of America**

[www.autism-society.org](http://www.autism-society.org)

Information on autism services, policies, and community resources.

# For Professional Development & Advocacy

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## **Organization for Autism Research (OAR)**

[www.researchautism.org](http://www.researchautism.org)

Focuses on evidence-based practices, with resources specific to ABA providers, including studies, training materials, and publications.

## **BACB Ethics Code for Behavior Analysts**

[www.bacb.com/ethics/](http://www.bacb.com/ethics/)

A crucial resource for ensuring ethical compliance in ABA practice. It's essential for providers to regularly review these standards.

## **National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH): Autism**

[www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/autism-spectrum-disorders-asd](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/autism-spectrum-disorders-asd)

Provides scientific information and updates on autism research and treatment approaches, including research relevant to ABA.

# Practical Tools & Family Support Resources

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## **Interactive Autism Network (IAN)**

[www.ianproject.org](http://www.ianproject.org)

A research network that connects families with studies to advance autism understanding, allowing ABA providers to share research opportunities with interested families.

## **Autism Navigator**

[www.autismnavigator.com](http://www.autismnavigator.com)

Offers online resources and courses for parents and providers to better understand autism, with tools that can complement ABA practices.

## **Autism Speaks Resource Guide**

[www.autismspeaks.org/resource-guide](http://www.autismspeaks.org/resource-guide)

A searchable directory of autism services and programs across the U.S. This can help ABA providers connect families with local resources and additional support services.

## **Autism Society's National Helpline**

[www.autism-society.org](http://www.autism-society.org)

Provides referrals and information to families and providers, offering quick access to autism-specific support across regions.

# Next Steps for ABA Providers

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- Ensure certification and background checks are up to date.
- Familiarize yourself with CPT codes and documentation requirements.
- Regularly review TRICARE updates and obtain additional training as needed.

# Need Assistance? We're here to support you!

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## Provider Inquiry

- Member Eligibility & Benefits
- Claims & Payment
- General Questions

Toll Free:  
1-888-732-7364

## Health Management

All calls go through Provider Inquiry

- Pre-Authorization
- Medical Necessity
- Utilization Management
- Discharge Planning
- Subacute Inquiries

Toll-Free:  
1-888-732-7364  
Fax:  
207-828-7865

## USFHP Care Management:

- Chronic Care
- Transitions of Care
- Behavioral Health
- Maternity
- Extended Care Health Option (ECHO)
- Wellness Coaching

Toll-Free:  
1-877-659-6534  
Fax:  
207-828-7858

## Mailing Address:

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