Aetna Autism
Spectrum Disorders (ASD) Support Program

Aetna Resources For Living℠
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a cluster of developmental disabilities that pose serious social, communication and behavioral challenges.
Aetna Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) Support Program

ASDs occur in families from all walks of life, regardless of race, ethnicity or socioeconomic background. The Centers for Disease Control places current estimates at an average rate of one in 110 children in the United States.¹

As a spectrum disorder, people are affected by the condition in different ways, ranging from mild to severe. While there are differences, people along the continuum share similar symptoms — such as difficulties with social interaction.

Impact on families

The diagnosis of ASD affects family members in different ways. For example, parents/caregivers must shift their primary focus to helping the child with ASD, which often strains marriages, sibling relationships, work, finances, personal relationships and responsibilities. Parents must often shift the bulk of their time and money toward providing treatment for their child, leaving less for other priorities.

Adobe Coverage for Autism

Adobe’s coverage for Autism includes the following:

- **Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)**
- **Speech Therapy** — expanded to cover services for developmental delays and Autism (up to 60 visits per year)
- **Occupational Therapy** — expanded to cover services for developmental delays and Autism (up to 60 visits per year*)

Among the interventions that are known to work in the treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorders is a group of therapies referred to as early intensive behavioral interventions, an example of which is Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). Not every child will respond to early intensive behavioral interventions, regardless of how much is provided.

Pre-certification Process

Prior to authorizing ABA, Aetna requires that the provider obtains pre-certification so that accurate information can be shared with members about what their plans actually cover. Aetna must also assess whether ABA and other services are needed. To do this, the provider will call our pre-certification department.

There is no “one size fits all” approach. And there is insufficient scientific support to determine — in advance — the optimal frequency, duration or intensity of ABA needed for a particular individual or a particular behavioral target symptom. Aetna typically would consider 25 hours per week for 6 months, sufficient for the initial authorization. This is adjusted based on further periodic reviews done with the provider.

* Limit is combined with Physical Therapy

Aetna’s Medical Necessity Guideline for the Treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorders (see link below) is an instrument used to aid in the decision-making process that determines the type and intensity of services — such as ABA — needed by a child with a condition on the Autism Spectrum. There is a range of problem behaviors that may be found in the individual with a condition on the Autism Spectrum (ASD). Behaviors may range from potentially dangerous self-injury and aggression at the severe end, to social awkwardness or eccentricities at the milder end. Aetna recognizes that for each child, the level of service needed is determined individually.

The Aetna Guideline helps evaluate an individual’s symptoms by identifying and tracking various behavioral dimensions and stages of treatment to assist in providing a complete clinical picture. There are basic requirements for ABA that include the presence of a diagnosis, a target behavior, parental involvement, a time-limited and individualized treatment plan, involvement of community resources and an appropriately qualified provider.

**Starting Treatment:** All the essential elements are evaluated. Initial authorizations are typically for up to 25 hours a week, for up to 6 months.

**Continuation of Treatment:** The essential elements are re-evaluated. In addition, the frequency of the target behavior should have diminished since the last review, or if not: there has been modification of the treatment or additional assessments have been performed, or interventions have been changed. Continued authorization is typically for up to 25 hours per week for up to 6 months.

**Termination of Treatment:** The essential elements are re-evaluated but are no longer all present. In addition, the target behavior has diminished; or there has been a generalization of training so that continued monitoring can occur in a less restrictive treatment setting; the improvement is sustainable; and caregivers are trained.

Please note: The Guideline does not replace medical judgment, where a doctor believes that a different level of care or course of treatment is necessary. Treating doctors are solely responsible for medical advice and member treatment.

Aetna’s Medical Necessity Guideline for the Treatment of Autism
http://www.aetna.com/healthcare-professionals/policies-guidelines/determining_coverage.html
Aetna can help

Aetna is committed to working with the individuals and families affected by an ASD diagnosis. Because of the complexities involved, as well as the importance of appropriate early intervention, specific areas of expertise are needed:

• Knowledge and experience in clinical and psychosocial arenas
• Ability to identify benefits and resources and facilitate their integration
• Skills in providing education and support to family members individually — and collectively

Aetna ASD Support Program

Aetna ASD Support Specialists can assist families with getting connected to:

• **Support groups:** Specialists talk with parents about the benefits of being connected to a support group for parents of children with ASD. These groups provide not only emotional support but also a way to network and learn about doctors, therapists, childcare providers, schools and more.

• **Advocacy:** Specialists assist families with information about educational support programs for children with ASD, disability rights, public policy and awareness events.

• **Child care services:** Specialists will research to locate providers with experience or training in caring for children with special needs. They will contact child care providers and obtain the names, addresses, hours, fees and other information about providers who are available.

• **Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) programs:** Specialists help parents learn about and get connected to ECI programs which offer developmental services, medical services, physical/occupational/speech therapy, counseling, family education and service coordination to eligible children.

• **Schools, camps and more:** Specialists can provide referrals to education programs, tutors, before or after school services, camps, recreation and respite programs — all to meet your family’s needs.

• **Health professionals:** Specialists provide resources to locate doctors and mental health professionals with expertise in ASD.

• **Local, state and federal agencies:** Specialists provide information to local, state and federal resources for families affected by ASD to learn about potential benefits including where and how to apply.

• **Information:** Specialists provide resources to find helpful literature, recommended readings, treatment and current research information. For example, organizations such as Autism Speaks and the AutismNational Autism Association are credible sources for the most up to date information.

• **Care management:** Aetna ASD Support Program Care Managers educate families about ASD and its treatment. They are knowledgeable about ASD support resources in the community or through federal programs and help facilitate those connections. They also coordinate communication between various providers such as: primary care physicians, behavioral health specialists and other healthcare teams involved with the child and family.

• **Benefit coordination:** Specialists step in to oversee monitoring of treatment reviews and intervention outcomes to help ensure ASD children receive the appropriate level of care and have the required authorizations for that care.

• **ASD Intervention Network:** The Aetna ASD Support Program team identifies providers in a family’s community who have specific expertise in Autism Spectrum Disorder, treatment and interventions. This includes providers with Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) capabilities, as ABA is one of the leading ASD interventions.
The bottom line
The Aetna ASD Support Program brings value to families with autistic children in a number of ways:

• **Help with the legwork**: Specialists do the legwork of identifying resources, overseeing the integration of related benefits and ensuring all providers involved are well-informed.

• **Best use of benefits**: Families get the most value by using all benefits effectively and efficiently, eliminating duplication and tapping all resources at their disposal.

• **Assurance of quality of care**: Parents are confident their ASD child receives the appropriate level of care and that interventions are effective.

• **Enhanced quality of life**: Support for families helps equip them with the skills needed to manage the challenges of an ASD diagnosis, which improves the health and well-being of the family unit as a whole.

Let the Aetna ASD Support Program help the entire family — because it truly takes a village to ensure the best life possible for families impacted by an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

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