

Mental health assessments for young children

Overview

In 2021, Governor Inslee signed into law 2021 c 126 § 2. This legislation changes policy within Apple Health to match best practices for the mental health assessment of children from birth through five years of age, including:

- (a) Allowing reimbursement for up to five sessions for the assessment;
- (b) Allowing reimbursement for clinician travel to home and community settings for the purposes of assessment; and
- (c) Requiring clinician use of the Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood (DC:0-5™).

Background

Approximately 10-14% of children birth to 5-years-old experience emotional, relational, or behavioral disturbances ([Brauner & Stevens, 2006](#)). These disorders, if properly identified using diagnostic criteria relevant to infant and early childhood development, can be effectively treated. Appropriate assessment leads to more effective treatment and reduces behavioral, school, and physical health risk factors over the long term.

What are the changes?

Updated Reimbursement Policies

On January 1, 2022, all Apple Health clinicians who provide mental health services to children birth through age five will be eligible for reimbursement for up to 5 sessions for the diagnostic intake assessment. These clinicians will also be eligible for reimbursement for travel to home and community settings for these sessions.

To support clinicians in accessing these reimbursements, HCA is making updates to several systems, including Washington Administrative Code (WAC), integrated managed care (IMC) contracts, Service Encounter Reporting Instructions (SERI), mental health billing guides, Provider One, and fee-for-service (FFS) reimbursement systems.

Support for Clinician Use of the DC:0-5™

The Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood (DC:0-5™) is the internationally accepted system for developmentally appropriate assessment of young children's mental health. The DC: 0 – 5™ uses developmentally specific diagnostic criteria and reflects mental health disorders that are typically diagnosed in infancy and early childhood.

To support clinicians in adopting the DC: 0 – 5™, the HCA will collaborate with external training partners to provide free training in the DC:0-5™ to mental health clinicians and allied professionals. Trainings will be offered from January 2022 until June 2023. The HCA will also provide a diagnostic crosswalk that connects DC:0-5™ diagnoses to DSM diagnoses and ICD codes for billing and documentation purposes.

Authority

2021 c 126 § 2;
2021 c 334 § 215 Proviso 43;
RCW 74.09.520

Budget

\$557,000 of the general fund—state appropriation and \$106,000 of the general fund—Medicaid appropriation for fiscal year 2022; \$522,000 of the general fund—state appropriation and \$72,000 of the general fund—Medicaid appropriation for fiscal year 2023.

Oversight

Health Care Authority

For more information

Visit the [Mental Health Assessment for Young Children](#) webpage

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