

Mental health assessment for young children (MHAYC)

In 2021, Governor Inslee signed [2021 c 126 § 2](#) into law. This legislation changed Apple Health policies to match best practices for [Mental Health Assessment for Young Children \(MHAYC\)](#), including:

- Allowing reimbursement for up to five sessions;
- Allowing reimbursement for provider travel to natural settings; and
- Requiring use of the Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood (DC:0-5).

Reimbursement policies

Beginning January 1, 2022, Apple Health policies allow reimbursement for up to five sessions for the assessment for children younger than six. In addition, mental health professionals are eligible for reimbursement for travel to natural settings for these sessions.

Using the DC:0-5

The DC:0-5 uses developmentally specific diagnostic criteria and reflects mental health and developmental disorders diagnosed in early childhood. It is recommended by the [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services \(CMS\)](#) and the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#) as a best practice for Infant-Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH). To support use of the DC:0-5, HCA and partners provide the following resources:

Professional development: The [Infant-Early Childhood Mental Health Workforce Collaborative \(IECMH-WC\)](#) provides free training in the DC:0-5, as well as other related professional development supports. Since March 2022, about 600 mental health professionals and 450 allied professionals have attended training.

Other tools and guidance: HCA publishes a [DC:0-5 crosswalk](#) that connects DC:0-5 diagnoses to Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorder (DSM) and International Classification of Disease (ICD) diagnoses for Apple Health reimbursement and documentation purposes. The 82-0470 (9/24)

Department of Health (DOH) also updated licensing requirements in 2022 to allow use of the DC:0-5 in diagnostic assessment statements.

Evaluation and outcomes

A [2022 survey](#) of twenty Apple Health mental health providers found that MHAYC policies made billing easier, increased provider competence, and improved access to services. However, providers still faced challenges in this area.

[Focus groups conducted in 2023](#) with about 100 mental health providers reiterated these positive impacts and expanded on specific challenges in adopting MHAYC practices:

- The current reimbursement process for provider travel is administratively burdensome and does not fully or equitably cover costs.
- Organizations need support to implement additional steps, like adapting assessment procedures and electronic health records.
- A limited IECMH workforce and current financing mechanisms are barriers to providing high-quality IECMH services, including assessment and diagnosis.

HCA is involved in several efforts to address these findings, as outlined in the [IECMH Statewide Tour Report – Priorities & Action Steps brief](#).

Lastly, a longitudinal analysis of the impact of these changes on access to mental health care for young children is underway and will be published in 2025.

Authority

2021 c 126 § 2; 2021 c 334 § 215 Proviso 43; RCW 74.09.520; WAC 182-531-1400; WAC 246-341-0640.

Budget

\$1,079,000 state appropriation and \$628,000 Medicaid appropriation for fiscal years 2024-2025.

More information

Mental Health Assessment for Young Children

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