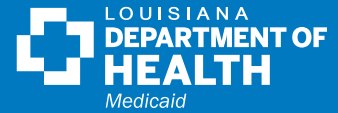


Arranging Medicaid-covered Applied Behavior Analysis-based (ABA) Services



What is Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)?

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a therapy that helps people learn new skills and improve behavior, often used with children who have autism, and some others. The therapist and family set goals, then break them into small steps. Each step is taught and practiced with clear instructions and rewards, like praise or treats, given for good progress. This makes learning fun and encourages positive behavior.

The therapist tracks how well the person is doing and adjusts the approach if needed. By using a step-by-step method and rewards, ABA helps people develop important skills and positive behaviors, improving their lives.

Who is eligible for Medicaid-covered ABA services?

Medicaid beneficiaries under the age of 21 can get ABA if they have behaviors that significantly interfere with home or community activities; have been diagnosed with a condition, such as autism, for which ABA is appropriate; and had an evaluation by a qualified health care professional to see if ABA is appropriate.

For Louisiana Medicaid to pay for ABA services for your child, your Healthy Louisiana plan has to approve it before the services are provided.

How to get Medicaid-covered ABA services:

ABA services are covered through the Healthy Louisiana plans: Aetna, AmeriHealth Caritas, Healthy Blue, Humana Healthy Horizons, Louisiana Healthcare Connections, or United HealthCare. These are called **managed care organizations** or "**MCOs**".

To get ABA for your child, you need take 3 steps:

1. Have your child evaluated by a qualified health care professional.
2. Find an ABA center or therapist who will provide ABA services to your child.
3. Cooperate with the ABA center or therapist in their assessment process.

There may be waiting lists for both the evaluation and the ABA center or therapist. So, you may want to work on finding both as soon as possible.

Step 1: Get a Comprehensive Diagnostic Evaluation from a health care professional.

Your child must first be evaluated by a qualified health care professional. (The evaluation is called a **CDE**, for **Comprehensive Diagnostic Evaluation**.) After evaluating your child, the health care professional will prepare a report explaining why your child does or does not need ABA services. You or the health care professional will need to provide the report to the ABA center or therapist that will give your child ABA services.

How do I find a qualified health care professional to evaluate my child?

Your child's pediatrician can do the evaluation, if he or she is willing to. If not, then the following types of health care professionals are also qualified to do an evaluation:

- Pediatric neurologist
- Developmental pediatrician
- Psychologist (including a medical psychologist)
- Psychiatrist (particularly pediatric and child psychiatrist)
- A pediatrician under a joint working agreement with an interdisciplinary team of providers who are qualified to diagnose developmental disabilities
- A nurse practitioner practicing under the supervision of a pediatric neurologist developmental pediatrician, psychologist or psychiatrist
- Licensed individual, including speech and language pathologist, licensed clinical social worker, or licensed professional counselor, when:
 - The individual has at least two years of experience providing such diagnostic assessments for ASD and comorbid disorders and treatments or is being supervised by a pediatric neurologist, developmental pediatrician, psychologist (including medical psychologist) or psychiatrist.
 - The individual's scope of practice includes a differential diagnosis of ASD and comorbid disorders for the age and/or cognitive level of the member.

The health care professionals must have an agreement with your child's MCO to be paid by Louisiana Medicaid. But the MCO can make a special agreement if needed.

If you need help finding a qualified professional to evaluate your child, you can ask your child's pediatrician for a referral or contact your child's support coordinator (if they have one) or their MCO (contact information below).

Step 2: Find an ABA center or therapist who will provide ABA services to your child.

You must select an ABA provider from your MCO's list of providers. The websites to find ABA providers are below:

- **Aetna Better Health** – <https://www.aetnabetterhealth.com/Louisiana/find-provider>
- **AmeriHealth Caritas** – <https://www.amerihealthcaritasla.com/pdf/provider/applied-behavior-analysis-provider-directory.pdf>
- **Healthy Blue** – <https://findcare.anthem.com/search-results-next>
- **Humana Healthy Horizons** – <https://finder.humana.com/finder/medical?customerid=1>
- **Louisiana Healthcare Connections** – <https://findaprovider.louisianahealthconnect.com/search-results>
- **United Healthcare** – <https://connect.werally.com/state-plan-selection/uhc.medicaid/state?coverageType=behavioral>

If you need help finding an ABA center or therapist to provide ABA services to your child, you can ask your child's pediatrician for a referral or contact your child's support coordinator (if they have one) or their MCO (contact information above).

Step 3: Cooperate with the ABA provider in their assessment process.

The first evaluation (CDE) was to see whether your child needs ABA services. Now the ABA center or therapist must assess what specific ABA services will help your child. Both will be submitted to your MCO in requesting its approval for ABA services.

Frequently Asked Questions

What if the MCO denies some or all of the ABA requested?

If the MCO denies approval, in whole or in part, the MCO must give clear reasons and explain how to fix it. The ABA provider may ask the MCO to reconsider its decision, you may appeal, or both.

What must be included in the evaluation report?

The report prepared by the health care professional who evaluated your child must detail, at a minimum:

1. A clinical history with the child's informed parent/caregiver, with developmental and psychological history.
2. Direct observation of the child, including, but not limited to, assessment of current functioning in the areas of social and communicative behaviors and play or peer interactive behaviors.
3. A review of available records.
4. A valid **Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5 (DSM-5)** diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder or any other condition for which ABA services are recognized as therapeutically appropriate.
5. Justification/rationale for referral/non-referral of the child for ABA services.
6. Recommendations for any other treatment.

Unlike many private health plans, Louisiana Medicaid does not require specific tests (such as the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) or the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales) for Medicaid to cover ABA services. But if the results above are inconclusive, some of these may be needed, which Medicaid can pay for after "prior approval":

- Autism specific assessments
- Assessments of general psychopathology
- Cognitive/developmental assessments
- Assessments of adaptive behavior

How long are ABA services approved for?

ABA services are initially approved for no more than 180 days. The ABA provider must conduct additional assessments at least every six months. Approvals are renewed when medically necessary.

Can a member change ABA providers?

Members have the right to change providers every 180 days, when an approval expires, unless a change is requested for good cause. Good cause includes:

- An allegation of abuse;
- A beneficiary doesn't progress;
- A new provider opens in area that had not been available; or
- When a dispute arises between the parent/caregiver and provider that cannot be resolved.
- If a provider change is requested based on good cause before the authorization period ends, the member or their case manager/support coordinator must contact the MCO (see MCO contact information below).

What if the member's CDE is several years old?

MCOs cannot deny ABA services because the CDE is too old. If an MCO asks for a new CDE—whether to start or continue services—they should not stop or delay approval of ABA services while waiting for the new CDE. MCOs must set up the CDEs they request.

Do providers have a wait list for ABA services?

Yes. Many ABA providers have a wait list for new patients. For assistance with finding an ABA provider, members should contact their support coordinator (if they have one) or their MCO.

What if a member's support coordinator or MCO are not responsive or cannot help or you have any questions about ABA services?

Contact the Louisiana Department of Health's Applied Behavior Analysis staff (toll-free) at **1-844-423-4762** or send an email to appliedbehavioranalysis@la.gov.

What if I also have private health insurance that has approved ABA services for my child?

If your private health plan has already prior authorized ABA services, then your child's ABA provider must submit proof of the prior authorization (such as an Explanation of Benefits or letter of approval) to the MCO.

What if I have private health insurance that has denied ABA services for my child?

If your private health plan denied a prior authorization request for ABA services, the child's ABA provider can still request approval from your MCO. Most private insurers only cover ABA services for children with an autism diagnosis. Medicaid covers ABA services for more conditions.

MCO Contact Information

Aetna Better Health

Phone (toll-free): 1-855-242-0802 • **TTY:** 711
24 hours a day, 7 days a week

AmeriHealth Caritas

Phone (toll-free): 1-888-756-0004 • **TTY:** 1-866-428-7588
24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Healthy Blue

Phone (toll-free): 1-844-521-6941 • **TTY:** 711
Monday – Friday, 7:00 AM – 7:00 PM CT

Humana Healthy Horizons

Phone (toll-free): 1-800-448-3810 • **TTY:** 711
Monday – Friday, 7:00 AM – 7:00 PM CT

Louisiana Healthcare Connections

Phone (toll-free): 1-866-595-8133 • **TTY:** 1-877-4285-4514
Monday – Friday, 7:00 AM – 7:00 PM CT

United Healthcare

Phone (toll-free): 1-866-675-1607 • **TTY:** 1-877-4285-4514
Monday – Friday, 7:00 AM – 7:00 PM CT

