

Requirements for comprehensive diagnostic evaluations by approved autism evaluation centers and independent evaluation teams

For Blue Cross commercial, Medicare Plus BlueSM,
Blue Care Network commercial and BCN AdvantageSM

Revised March 2025

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Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Blue Care Network-approved autism evaluation centers, or AAECs, and independent evaluation teams must:

- Meet the requirements outlined in this document.
- Follow the terms and conditions of the participation agreement for both Blue Cross and BCN.

If an AAEC or independent evaluation team doesn't meet these requirements, it may lose its ability to provide comprehensive diagnostic evaluations for Blue Cross or BCN members.

Requirements for AAECs and independent evaluation teams

The autism evaluation center or independent evaluation team must:

1. Complete a thorough (comprehensive) and interdisciplinary diagnostic evaluation of each Blue Cross or BCN member who presents for evaluation of a possible autism spectrum disorder.
2. Ensure that the following age-appropriate disciplines are represented on the core team of specialists that's primarily responsible for the evaluation and diagnosis of members:
 - Medical — Family practice physician, pediatrician or developmental pediatrician, internal medicine physician, neurologist (pediatric or adult)
 - Behavioral — Psychiatrist (pediatric or adult), psychologist (pediatric or adult), neurologist (pediatric or adult)
 - Speech and language therapist
3. Complete a comprehensive diagnostic evaluation for autism that must include the following components:
 - In-depth medical history — This may include developmental milestones, family history and any pertinent medical conditions.
 - Developmental and behavioral observations — The comprehensive diagnostic evaluation involves observing and assessing the individual's behavior and interactions. Observations may be related to communication abilities, play skills and repetitive behaviors. These may involve casual observations and information sourced from parents, caregivers and teachers.

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- Standardized testing — Testing includes the use of age-appropriate assessments designed to aid in diagnosing autism. Some examples include but are not limited to:
 - Autism Diagnostic Observation ScheduleTM, or ADOS
 - Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised, or ADI-R
 - Childhood Autism Rating ScaleTM, or CARS
 - Social Communication Questionnaire, or SCQ
 - Autism Spectrum Rating Scales[®], or ASRS
 - Social Responsiveness ScaleTM, or SRS

The testing must adequately evaluate behavior, communication and social interaction and include both interviews and observation.

- Assessments of cognitive, adaptive and language skills — These assessments check cognitive abilities, intellectual functioning and language skills.
 - Sensory assessments — These assess sensory sensitivities and processing difficulties, such as responses to stimuli. They also check how sensory experiences might affect the individual.
 - Collaborative approach — The comprehensive diagnostic evaluation must involve an interdisciplinary team of professionals, including psychologists, psychiatrists, pediatricians, and speech and language therapists. These professionals provide a comprehensive diagnostic evaluation from various perspectives.
4. Have other disciplines available that are not represented on the core team so they can participate in the comprehensive diagnostic evaluation on an as-needed basis. Other disciplines include — but aren't limited to — a geneticist, an occupational therapist and a licensed behavior analyst* or licensed Master's-level social worker with training in autism treatment principles. These ad-hoc participants don't need to be paid staff at the center but they must be identifiable and available.
 5. Have the following evaluative components available based on individual assessment needs as determined by the center:
 - Audiology evaluation
 - Lead screening
 - History and physical examination
 6. Have the following tests — which aren't needed for the comprehensive diagnostic evaluation of autism — available for the diagnosis of associated conditions:
 - Chromosome tests to detect a syndrome such as fragile-X or other genetic etiology

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- Metabolic tests if/when determined to be necessary by history or examination
 - Electroencephalogram, or EEG, test if there's suspicion of seizures based on the member's history
7. Provide a complete assessment and treatment plan to the member or the member's parent or legal guardian (as applicable) and to the practitioner from whom the member will receive applied behavior analysis services.

Note: In addition, the AAEC or the providers doing the comprehensive diagnostic evaluation may, as an option, record the results on the [Autism comprehensive diagnostic evaluation results form](#).

8. Prior authorization is required for ABA services provided by a licensed behavior analyst for all Medicare Plus Blue, BCN commercial and BCN Advantage members. For Blue Cross commercial, prior authorization is required for some members; contact Provider Inquiry to determine whether a specific Blue Cross commercial member requires prior authorization.

For each member for whom prior authorization is required, submit a prior authorization request as described in the document titled [Blue Cross Behavioral Health: Frequently asked questions for providers](#); see the section titled "How do I submit requests?" Be sure to attach the results of the evaluation and the *Autism comprehensive diagnostic evaluation results form*, if it was completed, to the request.

9. Follow these billing practices:

Note: These instructions apply only to billing the comprehensive diagnostic evaluation services. They don't apply when billing ABA treatment services.

- **For AAECs and independent evaluation teams:** Bill the comprehensive diagnostic evaluation services under either the center's group NPI or the NPI for the individual who provided the service. The center must be contracted with both Blue Cross and BCN to bill comprehensive diagnostic evaluation services. Bill in the same way that the center (or the individual who provided the comprehensive diagnostic evaluation) bills for any other services provided under the center's contracts with Blue Cross and BCN. Refer to the appropriate provider manual for billing instructions. Call Provider Inquiry if you have additional questions.
- **For AAECs only:** An AAEC may submit a claim for code **T1023 for each interdisciplinary evaluation. The claim should reflect the final diagnosis determined by the comprehensive diagnostic evaluation team after the interdisciplinary conference has occurred. The diagnosis doesn't need to be for autism spectrum disorder. When billing procedure code **T1023, use one of the following:
 - The group / NPI for the center
 - If the center doesn't have a separate group NPI, use the NPI of the director of the center

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Use the same NPI for each member evaluated and let Blue Cross/BCN know immediately if the NPI changes.

How to request an application to become an AAEC

To apply to become an approved autism evaluation center, fill out the [Letter of intent to become an approved autism evaluation center](#) to request an application. Follow the instruction on the form to return it.

What to do if the member is having trouble getting a comprehensive diagnostic evaluation completed

A “bridge authorization” allows members to start applied behavior analysis treatment services while they’re in the process of completing the components of the comprehensive diagnostic evaluation for autism.

To be considered for a bridge authorization, the following criteria must be met:

- The provider must submit enough objective measures to substantiate the diagnosis of autism and to show that ABA treatment services are indicated.
- The ABA provider and the member or the member’s parent or guardian must understand that:
 - The member has to complete the comprehensive evaluation within three to six months through an AAEC approved by Blue Cross and BCN or through qualified independent providers.
 - If the AAEC or independent providers make a diagnosis other than autism, the authorization for ABA treatment services will end immediately once Blue Cross Behavioral Health receives the diagnosis.

If the provider or the member has a concern about obtaining an evaluation or has questions about past autism testing, screening and clinical information, call Blue Cross Behavioral Health.

Accessing the medical policies related to autism disorder services

To access the Blue Cross and BCN medical policies on autism spectrum disorder services:

1. Visit the [Medical Policy Router Search](#) page at **bcbsm.com**.
2. In the Policy / Topic Keyword field, enter Applied Behavioral Analysis, then click the search icon.
3. In the results, click the pertinent link:
 - *Medical Policy - Autism Spectrum Disorder Services*

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- *Medical Policy - Autism Spectrum Disorder Services - Medicare Advantage*

These policies and other medical policies are updated on a regular basis.

*Effective Jan. 7, 2020, behavior analysts must be licensed by the state of Michigan to be reimbursed by Blue Cross or BCN for services provided to commercial members. For Medicare Advantage members, ABA treatment must be performed by a Medicare-approved provider type for whom ABA is within their scope of practice.

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