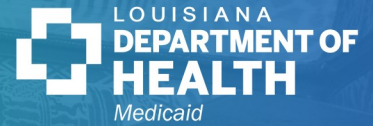


PUBLIC UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM (PUPP)



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University Partnership Research Brief

“Meeting Technology Needs to Improve Access to High-Value Behavioral Healthcare”



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College/School: College of Nursing and Health Professions

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WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THE TOPIC?

There is a shortage of mental and behavioral healthcare professionals across the state of Louisiana [1]. Waitlists for applied behavior analysis therapy are currently growing in parishes throughout all Louisiana Department of Health Regions in the state, resulting in a demonstrated need for high-value behavioral healthcare service providers. Providing parent training to families in each region helps attenuate barriers to accessing healthcare. If families lack resources or are unaware of the available resources, they are less likely to receive the necessary behavioral healthcare services covered under their plans.

WHAT DID THIS PROJECT DO?

Clinical staff were trained to implement new behavioral healthcare technology in an applied behavior analysis clinic to support Medicaid families. Parent trainings were delivered to disseminate information, raise awareness and provide educational materials. Recent data on International Classification of Diseases (ICD) and Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) codes used in applied behavior analysis treatment services were studied to assess low-value care delivery in LDH Regions.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Applied behavior analysis (ABA) therapy is currently the only evidence-based best practice treatment for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) according to Slocum et al. (2014). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022) report a rising incidence rate for ASD in recent years with 1 in 44 children receiving a diagnosis before the age of eight. The ability to access behavioral healthcare services earlier and with the appropriate clinical frequency (i.e., clinical need) equates to high-value healthcare. This is beneficial for families and caregivers in managing and treating the symptoms of ASD. Louisiana Medicaid provides access to

ABA therapy services to individuals from birth to age 21 with an appropriate diagnosis and a prescription for therapy. Behavior analytic assessments with healthcare providers often involve in vivo observations of client behavior, assessment materials, and data collection. Digital applications are now available that can reduce the time necessary to process client assessments for service delivery. [4] Virtual reality technology can be incorporated into ABA therapy to promote client engagement in safe, simulated environments.

WHAT CAN MEDICAID DO WITH THIS INFORMATION?

Evaluate a need-based assessment for applied behavior analysis services to decrease wait-times for high-value behavioral healthcare. Allocate additional resources to LDH Regions with an underserved population to promote access to treatment.

PROJECT DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This project had three main aims: first, to ensure clinical staff’s competency in ABA technical skills related to new technology implementation, second, to promote parent and caregiver trainings related to available evidence-based ABA services for Medicaid families, and third, to conduct a cohort study evaluating billing and diagnostic codes related to ASD and ABA therapy service delivery.

Clinical staff were first trained in new skills to increase scope of competence in delivering ABA therapies involving technology (i.e., web-based application assessments and virtual reality). Targeted trainings focused on functional daily living skills to promote independence and overall quality of life related to functional independence for individuals with ASD diagnoses were conducted.

After the implementation of clinical therapies, parent and caregiver trainings were offered to increase awareness of and access to available ABA services for Medicaid families. One training focused specifically on financial planning for families of children with ASD.

Recent data on ICD diagnostic and Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) billing codes used in ABA therapy services were evaluated to measure low-value care delivery in LDH Regions across the state. There are currently 40 doctorally-prepared Board Certified Behavior Analysts and 640 master’s-prepared Board Certified Behavior Analysts in Louisiana [5]. When comparing the diagnostic codes to the CPT codes used for billing, we assessed the type of services delivered by eligible provider type (technician under supervision, credentialed behavior analyst). Implications for underserved regions were assessed.

RESULTS

Table 1 2024 Behavior Analyst Certificants Distribution

BCBA-D	BCBA	BCaBA	RBT	Total
40	640	103	722	1505

Source: Behavior Analyst Certification Board Region-Specific Certificant Data (2024)

Incorporating technology into clinical ABA therapy services was largely actionable within a short timeframe. Staff training required an initial investment, however, the ABA service delivery by behavior technicians and clinical behavior analysts promoted access to increased care. There are a growing number of technicians under supervision with the potential to become fully credentialed behavior analysts.

There were nine primary CPT codes assessed across eligible diagnoses. The results revealed that behavior technicians under the direct supervision of qualified healthcare providers such as Board Certified Behavior Analysts and Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA) at the Doctoral Level (BCBA-D) practitioners were assisting with healthcare protocols.

Table 2 Associated CPT Billing Codes

CPT Billing Code	Brief Description
0362T	Behavioral Identification assessed by Qualified Healthcare Provider onsite with Two or More Technicians
0373T	Adaptive Behavioral Protocol by Qualified Healthcare Provider with Two or More Technicians
97151	Behavior Identification Assessment
97153	Adaptive Behavior Treatment by Protocol from Technician under direction of Qualified Healthcare Provider
97154	Group Adaptive Behavior Treatment by Technician under direction of Qualified Healthcare Provider
97155	Adaptive Behavior Treatment with Protocol Modification under direction of Qualified Healthcare Provider
97156	Family Adaptive Behavior Treatment
97157	Multiple Family Group Adaptive Behavior administered by Qualified Healthcare Provider without patient present.
97158	Group Adaptive Behavior Treatment

CONCLUSIONS AND HEALTH POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Louisiana currently provides coverage to Medicaid families for ABA therapy services and behavioral healthcare. Increasing access to and awareness of available resources will allow families to more readily access high-value behavioral healthcare services, especially in underserved regions. Areas where there are a lower number of providers to clients would benefit from an investment of workforce development funding to develop a network of behavior technicians who become future qualified healthcare providers in underserved regions across the state.

REFERENCES

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