Autism Diagnosis

What to Know About TRICARE's Autism Care Demonstration (ACD)

To qualify for Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy under TRICARE's Autism Care Demonstration (ACD), a child must first receive an official diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) from a TRICARE-authorized provider. To maintain eligibility, a new referral and DSM-5 checklist must be submitted by the medical provider every two years.

Diagnosing and Referring Providers

 ASD diagnosing and referring providers include: TRICARE-authorized Primary Care Manager (PCMs) and specialized ASD diagnosing providers.

APPROVED ASD-DIAGNOSING PROVIDERS (Effective Oct. 1, 2021)

TRICARE authorized PCMs include TRICARE authorized:

- Pediatricians
- Family medicine physicians
- Pediatric or family nurse practitioners

Authorized ASD-diagnosing providers include TRICARE authorized:

- Physicians board certified or board eligible in:
 - Developmental/behavioral pediatrics
 - Neurodevelopmental pediatrics
 - Child neurology
 - Child psychiatry
- Doctoral-level licensed clinical psychologists
- Board certified Doctors of Nursing Practice

Graphic from TRICARE® Autism Care Demonstration Fact Sheet

- Details for Doctors of Nursing Practice (DNPs):
 - ⇒ For DNPs credentialed as developmental pediatric providers, dual American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) board certifications are required as follows: 1) either a pediatric NP or a family NP; and 2) either (Family, or Child/Adolescent) Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP) or a (Child/Adolescent) Psychiatric and Mental Health Clinical Nurse Specialist (PMHCNS).
 - ⇒ For DNPs credentialed as psychiatric and mental health providers, single ANCC board certification is required as follows: as either a (Family or Child/Adolescent) PMHNP or a PMHCNS.
- Diagnoses and referrals from Physician Assistants (PAs) or other providers not having the above qualifications shall not be accepted.
- Note: Adult beneficiaries participating in the ACD who age out of the diagnosing/referring provider pediatric scope of practice may only be diagnosed/referred by a clinical psychologist.

Validated Assessment Tool Requirement

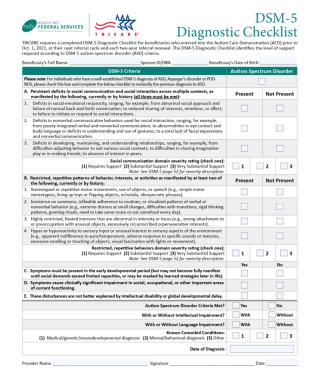
A validated assessment tool must be administered by the TRICARE authorized diagnosing provider. The tool must be from the following list:

- Screening Tool for Autism in Toddlers and Young Children (STAT)
- Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule-Second Edition (ADOS-2)
- Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised (ADI-R)
- Childhood Autism Rating Scale-Second Edition (CARS-2)
- o Gilliam Autism Rate Scale, Third Edition (GARS-3)*

*If the GARS-3 was completed, a diagnostic evaluation demonstrating the diagnosing provider used other methodology to supplement the parent questionnaire to render a diagnosis is also required.

Diagnosis Documentation Requirements

- A diagnosis based on a clinical interview alone is not sufficient documentation to support medical necessity of services.
- A parent questionnaire alone is not sufficient for diagnostic documentation.
 - For ACD eligibility, the covered diagnosis is ASD (F84.0) according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illnesses, Fifth edition (DSM-5)/Autistic Disorder according to the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision, Clinical Modification (ICD-10-CM).
- The ASD diagnosis must specify the level of support according to the DSM-5 criteria (Level 1 = mild, Level 2 = moderate, or Level 3 = severe).
- The DSM criteria must be documented in a Defense Health Agency (DHA)approved checklist in the referral.



Services For Beneficiaries Diagnosed with ASD

Many services for the management/treatment of ASD are covered under the TRICARE Basic benefit, while others are covered under the ACD.

- TRICARE Basic benefit coverage (which follow respective referral and authorization processes) include, but are not limited to:
 - o Medical team conference with interdisciplinary team of health care professional
 - Occupational Therapy (OT)
 - o Pharmacotherapies
 - Physical Therapy (PT)
 - Psychotherapies (to include Parent-Mediated Programs)
 - Psychological Testing
 - Respite Care (covered as part of Extended Care Health Option (ECHO), must be active duty <u>and</u> enrolled in Exceptional Family Member Program in order to enroll in ECHO)
 - Speech-Language Pathology (SLP)
- ACD coverage:
 - o Autism services coordination via the Autism Services Navigator (ASN)
 - ABA services
- In addition to the services listed here, other services may be available from other sources
 within the Department of Defense (i.e., Military OneSource, Service provided Respite, etc.),
 other Government programs (OGPs) such as the Medicaid Waiver program, and other nonclinical services such as an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Individual Family
 Service Plan (IFSP). It is important to note that not all services may be clinically appropriate
 for all people, families, or situations.

For additional information on how to get ABA services, please see the Autism Care Demonstration Fact Sheet

Website References:

https://www.tricare.mil/autism

https://tricare.mil/About/Regions/West-Region/Find-Care/Autism-Care-Demonstration https://manuals.health.mil/pages/DisplayManualHtmlFile/2024-05-30/AsOf/TOT5/C18S3.html#BABHFDBBC5 https://manuals.health.mil/pages/DisplayManualHtmlFile/2025-07-29/ChangeOnly/tot5/C18S3.html