

Autism , Medicare Services and the New Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) Package



Below is some information on how to maximize the use of services for your patients through private provider services rebatable through Medicare, and on the New Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) Package.

1. Existing Medicare Rebatable Services Accessed via GP Referral

The Enhanced Primary Care Plan

As Autism Spectrum Disorders are a chronic condition, patients can access the following through Enhanced Primary Care Plans-

- 5 sessions with an Allied Health Professional per calendar year
- \$4,250 over 2 consecutive years worth of dental treatment if the GP feels that the condition is causing the dental problems- eg. teeth grinding, eating non-edible items, refusal to brush teeth because of sensory or behavioral issues. NB- the 2 year period is counted from the calendar year of the patient's first eligible dental services -if the first service is in November 2008, then the calendar years are 2008 and 2009.

The 5 sessions with AHPS can be used to supplement the 20 in a lifetime visits that can be now accessed via a pediatricians or psychiatrists through specific Medicare Autism items (See "New Government Medicare Initiatives" below).

The Mental Health Care Plan

Individuals with ASD's often experience significant mental health problems including anxiety, depression and obsessive behaviors. Better Access to Mental Health care provides access to AHPS, including individual and group sessions.

You will need to prepare a mental health care plan (2710) for the client to access these services.

2. New Government Medicare Initiatives

In July 2008, the federal Government introduced a range of initiatives to support families and Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (including aspergers syndrome), PDD-NOS, Rett's Disorder, or Childhood Disintegrative Disorder. These include seek new Medicare items which

enable access to private Allied Health Professionals for diagnosis and/or treatment. Access to these services is **via a pediatrician or psychiatrist**.

Where a GP suspects a child may have an ASD or PDD, a referral to a pediatrician or psychiatrist is indicated. It is then standard for a pediatrician to arrange speech, psychological and sometimes Occupational Therapy assessment before a definitive diagnosis is made. "Helping Children with Autism Increased Access to Diagnosis" allows up to a total of 4 appointments from a private provider eg. 2 from a Speech Therapist, one from an Occupational Therapist and one from a Psychologist.

With children who already have a diagnosis they will need an appointment for an Autism Management Plan with their pediatrician or psychiatrist. The Management Plan must be written by the child's 13th birthday, and services used by their 15th birthday. They can then access up to 20 visits in a lifetime from private Speech Therapists, Occupational therapists and/or psychologists.

An important role for the GP is to consider whether an EPC, and/or Better Access to Mental Health Care through a Mental Health Care Plan can increase/supplement the level and variety of services a child can access.

3. New Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) Package

\$12,000 early intervention support for children 0 – 6 years

Children diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, who are aged between 0 and 6 are now eligible to receive \$6,000 per year for 2 years before they go to primary school. This money is to help those families who are on waiting lists for early intervention services, as well as families who are already accessing early intervention. Parents may choose therapies from psychology, speech or occupational therapy, as well as treatments such as ABA (Applied Behaviour Analysis) and Sensory Integration.

Once a diagnosis is made, the parent makes an application through an **Autism Advisor** at Autism Victoria, on 9657 1600. This starts the process where children can access appropriately trained providers to provide early intervention services.

4. Who are the Autism Advisors and What is their Role?

Autism Victoria has been selected to provide **The Autism Advisor Program** for Victoria. The team consists of a Team Leader, 2 Senior Autism Advisors and 4 Autism Advisors, all of whom have over 50 years combined experience across the field of Autism. The Autism Advisors are based in the CBD office in Carlton. Each advisor has responsibility for a metro area (Inner, North, South, East and West) as well as rural areas, and will also spend time out in each of these areas meeting with families and visiting provider services to gain further information about provider services.

Autism Advisors will:

- Ensure that families and carers understand the diagnosis and the clinical treatment plan that is prepared by the diagnostician/s
- Provide factual, impartial and evidence based information about the types of educational and behavioural interventions that have produced positive outcomes for children with ASDs
- Provide information about local early intervention programs that would best meet the particular needs of their child, including availability of places that are subsidised by the Australian Government's HCWA package, the waiting times to access these places and any additional costs that may be incurred by the family/carers
- Provide a gateway for access to the early intervention funding package for families, \$6,000 per child per Financial Year (\$12,000 in total)
- Provide families and carers with information about local educational and support activities that they can access, including the family support workshops and local playgroups provided through the HCWA package Link families and carers to local support networks, including links to advocacy groups that can act on their behalf if required
- Provide information about related allied health providers in their area .Advise families/carers about available resources that can assist them to care for their child
- Provide information and assistance for families/carers to access support services or benefits that are provided by state government programs or other Australian Government programs e.g. Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres Assist families, carers and children from Indigenous and CALD backgrounds to access translation and culturally appropriate services
- Provide assistance for families, carers and children living in rural and remote areas to access early intervention and support activities.

(This information is taken from the Autism Victoria website)

5. Useful websites for GP's and families

autismvictoria.org.au Ph 9657 1600 or 1300 308 699- this includes information on characteristics of individuals though early childhood to adulthood, diagnosis, treatment, services, strategies, resources and publications.

irabina.com Ph 9720 1118 intervention service that provides family centred programs from the time of diagnosis to school entry for children and their families who are challenged by Autism Spectrum Disorder and who reside predominantly in the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne.