

WISCONSIN AUTISM PROVIDERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

December 2020

2020 has been an unprecedented and busy year.



WAPA's activities & accomplishments.



Advocating for Increased Medicaid Reimbursement Rates

January 2020: WAPA Leadership met with Jim Jones, Medicaid director to discuss our request for a Medicaid rate increase to address access issues for members with Medicaid.

Feb-March 2020: WAPA Leadership met with members of the State Legislature to advocate for a Legislative Council Study Committee on challenges to accessing early autism treatment in WI.

June 2020: Legislative Council announced there would be a new format for Study Committees due to the pandemic, and Early Access to Autism Treatment was 1 of 4 topics selected for a weekly Symposium Series.

* We want to give a special thank you to the "champion" of our cause, Senator Andre Jacque who was the Legislative Council member to endorse our application for a study committee.

July 2020: WAPA Leadership met with Senator Jacque to discuss access issues and our proposed solutions.

*Senator Jacque has expressed interest in putting forward legislation to support autism treatment during the fall/winter term, in addition to his endorsement of WAPA's request for the symposium series. We are currently pursuing this possibility (keep your fingers crossed).

Symposium on Early Access to Autism Treatment

August 2020: WAPA conducted surveys about service access challenges, inviting all autism Evaluation and Treatment providers in the state to participate. **83% of treatment providers responded. Thank you!!!!** Here are the highlights of the survey:

- 1100 children are waiting for diagnostic assessments (We expect this number is closer to 2000, with just over 50% of evaluation providers responding to the survey.)
- 1300 children were reported to be waiting for ABA services, which is an increase from our previous surveys (800 in Nov 2017; 1200 in May 2019).
- 43% of providers have a waitlist of 6 months or longer for Medicaid clients
- 56% of providers report a minimum of 15% unstaffed treatment hours
- 23% of providers are only accepting new clients with commercial insurance coverage (not taking Medicaid)
- 58% of providers limit their travel to 30 miles or less from their office

- Information on presenters and session slides can be found here: <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/lc/study/2020/2081%C2%A0>
- WAPA Leadership presented during Week 2 of the series
- Explanation of ABA, research on treatment effectiveness, long-term cost savings
- Presented Aug 2020 survey results
- Described challenges and potential solutions for payor specific barriers to service delivery
 - Medicaid: We recommended increased reimbursement rates, allowing concurrent billing, reducing burden of PA process, streamlining billing process
 - Commercial Insurance: There are challenges with polices that fall outside of the insurance mandate, and some payors require unrealistic level of parent participation to authorize treatment, which is a violation of MHPAEA.
- For a copy of WAPA's presentation slides, click here: https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/lc/study/2020/2081/020_week_2_access_to_early_behavioral_treatment_september_15_2020_2_00_p_m/sep15presentation_autism

Next Steps

- WAPA leadership met with Rep Reimer and Rep Hesselbein of the Joint Finance Committee in October to advocate for a Medicaid Rate increase in the 2021-2023 state budget.
 - Husch-Blackwell (WAPA's lobbying partners) met with the Governor's office to begin advocating for a Medicaid Rate increase in the 2021-2023 state budget.
 - WAPA leadership met with Jim Jones, Medicaid Director on Nov. 16, 2020 to discuss requests for reimbursement rate increase and concurrent billing.
 - WAPA Leadership attended a virtual listening session hosted by the Governor's office to provide input on Health Issues for consideration in the 2021-2023 state budget.
 - WAPA will be scheduling a meeting with Julie Walsh of the Office of the Commissioner of Insurance (OCI) to discuss updates to the Insurance Mandate to reduce the number of polices that fall outside of the current mandate.



Supporting Providers during the Pandemic

- During the pandemic, WAPA extended support and resources to all WI ABA providers, regardless of their membership status with WAPA.
- March 20: WAPA emailed resources from CalABA and BHCOE to WI ABA providers.
- March 23: WAPA held zoom meeting for WI ABA providers to discuss response to COVID-19 Pandemic and best practices in supporting clients and staff. Pam Lano from DHS attended the meeting to present on recent changes to both permanent and temporary (emergency) telehealth policy.
- March 24- 30: WAPA distributed information from DHS regarding Emergency Policy Updates as they were released.
- March 30: WAPA and WisABA co-drafted a letter to WI State Legislative Members, WI Governor Tony Evers, and WI US Congress Representatives advocating for ABA providers to be included in emergency funding packages related to the pandemic.
- April 6: WAPA held a second COVID 19 response meeting open to all providers in the state. We reviewed recent changes to telehealth policy and shared resources from BHCOE, BACB, ABAI, and CASP on telehealth service provision.

Collaborating with DHS on Policy Updates

Dec 2019: DHS held the 1st Behavioral Treatment Stakeholder Meeting, inviting leadership from WAPA, WisABA, and the Waisman Center.

- DHS explained that individual providers who request meetings with DHS about the Behavior Treatment Benefit will be encouraged to contact the professional organizations (WAPA, WisABA) to access information and support.
- Health Exam requirements for Behavioral Treatment PAs were relaxed.
- Projects "in cue" for 2020: Telehealth policy, allowing billing claims to be submitted under billing provider (BCBA) rather than the rendering provider (tech), allowing group ABA codes for social skills. (Note that these plans were made pre-pandemic and are currently "on the back burner".)
- WAPA advocated for concurrent billing of behavioral treatment codes, telehealth coverage, allowing BT Therapists to deliver Family Treatment Guidance, and a more streamlined and transparent PA review process.

May 2020: 2nd DHS Behavioral Treatment Stakeholder Meeting focused on the temporary telehealth policy and input on the future permanent policy, which was expected to be implemented by end of year.

- DHS provided reassurance that the temporary telehealth policies would remain in effect until a permanent policy is established, so there will be no sudden lapse in telehealth service provision.
- Items tabled for next meeting: concurrent billing, social skills group codes

Nov 2020: 3rd DHS Behavioral Treatment Stakeholder Meeting

- **See attached flyer for important updates from DHS**, which WAPA was asked by DHS to disseminate to ABA providers.
- DHS is considering extending the Behavioral Treatment Benefit to adult members beyond the age of 21. Any providers interested in providing services to adults should contact Alisa Morrison to help get this much needed project moving forward. alisa.morrison@dhs.wisconsin.gov
- DHS is still working on updates related to concurrent billing and ABA group codes and hopes to implement these in 2021.
- WAPA is also represented on the Governor's Autism Council, which meets quarterly to inform and advise DHS and the Governor on issues related to autism and intervention.



Thank you for being a WAPA Member!