

# CANS: A Family Guide



## What Is the CANS?

MassHealth requires behavioral health providers to do a comprehensive assessment when they first start working with children and youth aged 20 years and younger.\* The provider will spend time getting to know you and your child, the problems your child is facing, and your hopes for treatment. The first time you meet with your child's behavioral health provider (for example, a clinical social worker, family therapist, mental health counselor, or psychologist), he or she will probably begin a "CANS" for your child.

*The CANS is a form that providers use to gather information during the assessment process. It may be filled out by hand on paper, or electronically with a computer.*

**CANS** stands for **C**hild and **A**dolescent **N**eeds and **S**trengths. Strengths are areas of your child's life where he or she is doing well or has an interest or ability. Perhaps your son loves art or your daughter has volunteered in an animal shelter. Or your family has many caring friends and relatives. Needs are areas where your child requires help or serious intervention. Perhaps your child seems depressed or is having behavior problems.

Providers use the assessment process to get to know the children and families they work with and to understand their strengths and needs. The CANS can help you decide which of your child's needs are the most important to address in a treatment plan. The CANS also helps you and your child pick out strengths, which can be the basis of a treatment plan. By working with the provider during the assessment process and talking together about the CANS, you can develop a treatment plan that works with your child's strengths and needs.

\* MassHealth offers several types of behavioral health services for children and youth aged 20 years and younger. Certain services involve complete assessment and coordination of care when the child is involved in other services. Known as "Hub Services," these include Intensive Care Coordination, In-Home Therapy, and Outpatient Therapy. Some children may be involved in more than one Hub Service. As a MassHealth provider, each Hub Service provider is required to use the CANS form and must complete and update it every 90 days.

Another set of services includes Family Support and Training (Family Partners), In-Home Behavioral Health Services, and Therapeutic Mentors. They are "Hub-Dependent Services," that is, they need a referral from a Hub Service. Providers of these services do not need to complete the CANS but should review the CANS done in the Hub Service.

*You should get copies of your child's CANS from his or her provider to share with other providers who work with your family.*



## How Are CANS Ratings Given?

The CANS is made up of seven sections that focus on different areas in the child's life. Each section consists of a group of items that include how your child functions in everyday life, specific emotional or behavioral concerns, risk behaviors, strengths, and for older children, skills needed to move into adult life. One section asks about your family's beliefs and preferences, while another asks about general family concerns. The provider gives a number rating to each of these items. These ratings help the provider understand where intensive or immediate action is most needed, and where your child has strengths that could be a major part of the treatment plan.

Of course, ratings do not tell the whole story of a child's strengths and needs. Each CANS section also has a comment space where a provider can give more information about that area of life. The provider can note questions that need to be explored further, or areas where people involved with the child have different ideas about him or her.

## Updating the CANS

Providers can update the CANS to track progress and revise plans. Each provider normally updates the CANS every 90 days. This is a good time for you to talk with your provider about what has been accomplished through treatment, how the plan is working, and any changes that should be made.

# What Is CANS Consent?

## Why Is Consent So Important?

Your child's provider will ask for your consent or permission to enter the CANS ratings and comments into MassHealth's secure online database known as the Virtual Gateway. When you give permission, you are allowing MassHealth, your child's managed-care plan, and other providers at the same organization who work with your child to see his or her CANS records. Your child may work with other providers from different organizations. They will also ask for your permission to enter your child's CANS information into the Virtual Gateway and to see CANS records entered by other providers. Only providers who have your permission can do this. Providers who do not have your permission must complete the CANS on paper and keep it in your child's medical record.

Your consent **does not** allow other state agencies, such as the Department of Youth Services or Department of Children and Families, to see your child's CANS record. To protect your child's privacy MassHealth keeps tight control over who has access to the database. Access to your CANS record is restricted and protected under state and federal privacy laws.

## What Are the Benefits of Giving Consent?

With your permission, all providers caring for your child will be able to share the CANS online. Sharing the CANS helps everyone to be "on the same page" for your child, and may save you from having to answer the same questions for different providers.

Giving permission for the provider to enter your child's CANS information into the database allows him or her to print a CANS report for you at any point in your child's treatment. If you wish to share a CANS assessment that was completed on paper with other providers, you will need to ask for a copy.

Updating the CANS in the database is easy for your provider. He or she can simply edit the CANS that was done the last time, leaving more time to focus on your child's treatment plan.

Finally, MassHealth uses the CANS to understand how its services are helping families. Having this information allows MassHealth to improve services in ways that can help your child and others in the future.

