



**Commonwealth of Massachusetts**  
**Executive Office of Health and Human Services**  
**Office of Medicaid**  
[www.mass.gov/masshealth](http://www.mass.gov/masshealth)

**MassHealth**  
**Mental Health Center Bulletin 35**  
**December 2021**

**TO:** Mental Health Centers Participating in MassHealth  
**FROM:** Amanda Cassel Kraft, Assistant Secretary for MassHealth   
**RE:** **Preventive Behavioral Health Services for Members Younger Than 21**

## **Background**

The COVID-19 pandemic is significantly and uniquely impacting the well-being of children and adolescents. This is particularly true in populations already at risk for poor health outcomes due to longstanding inequities—many Black and Latinx children and youth and individuals in the perinatal period are experiencing increased anxiety and depression as well as other behavioral health concerns. Absent targeted intervention, many of MassHealth’s youngest members may be at risk of developing clinical-level behavioral health disorders and worsening health. Earlier identification and intervention are key to providing children, adolescents, and their caregivers with needed behavioral health supports to preserve and promote their well-being.

For many youth, short-term interventions in supportive group settings cultivate coping skills and strategies for symptoms of depression, anxiety, and other social/emotional concerns, which may prevent the development of behavioral health conditions. Very young children can benefit from interventions that target the well-being of the caregiver-child dyad, as well as provide guidance for caregivers on how to support their developmental and emotional health.

To address and mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic on children and adolescents, and to further healthy developmental outcomes for MassHealth-enrolled youth, mental health centers (MHCs) participating in MassHealth may provide medically necessary preventive behavioral health services for members from birth until age 21.

## **Preventive Behavioral Health Services**

Effective for dates of service on or after September 1, 2021, members younger than age 21 are eligible for preventive behavioral health services if they have a positive behavioral health screen (or, in the case of an infant, a positive post-partum depression screening), even if they do not meet criteria for behavioral health diagnosis and therefore do not meet medical necessity criteria for behavioral health treatment.

Preventive behavioral health services must be recommended by a physician or other licensed practitioner practicing within their scope of licensure to recommend such services. To determine the member’s needs, a provider must administer and document the results of an age-appropriate behavioral health screen using a tool from the list of MassHealth-approved screeners in Appendix W of the MassHealth provider manual (also listed at [www.mass.gov/info-details/learn-about-the-approved-masshealth-screening-tools](http://www.mass.gov/info-details/learn-about-the-approved-masshealth-screening-tools)). A diagnostic assessment, such as the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANES), is not required before the initiation of preventive behavioral health services.

## **Utilization Management**

Preventive behavioral health services are covered without prior authorization (PA). During delivery of preventive behavioral health services, if the provider determines that a member has further clinical needs, they must refer the member and family for evaluation, diagnostic, and treatment services.

## **Providers and Billing**

Preventive behavioral health services must be provided by a qualified and credentialed behavioral health clinician, or a non-licensed clinician or trainee under supervision.

Preventive behavioral health services provided by Mental Health Centers should be billed using the following billing codes.

- 90853 Group psychotherapy (other than multiple-family group)

All claims for preventive behavioral health services must be submitted with modifier EP on the claim. All claims must include the most clinically appropriate ICD diagnosis code, including, as appropriate, Zcodes that may be used as the primary diagnosis, when clinically appropriate. Preventive behavioral health services provided to the caregiver-child dyad should be billed under the child's MassHealth ID when such services are directly related to the needs of the child and such services are delivered to the infant and caregiver together.

## **Resources and Referrals**

Preventive behavioral health services providers should refer to the following resources in order to make referrals and linkages to other MassHealth services available to children and youth:

- The Massachusetts Behavioral Health Access (MABHA) ([www.mabhaccess.com/Home.aspx](http://www.mabhaccess.com/Home.aspx)) website helps both providers and individuals locate openings in mental health and substance use disorder services. EOHHS welcomes everyone to search for services that they can access directly from their community.
- The Children's Behavioral Health Initiative (CBHI): [www.mass.gov/service-details/cbhi-brochures-and-companion-guide](http://www.mass.gov/service-details/cbhi-brochures-and-companion-guide), includes a brochure for families that can be downloaded or requested in hard copy, free of charge.
- For pediatric psychiatric consultation and referral for ongoing behavioral health care, contact MCPAP at [www.mcpap.com](http://www.mcpap.com).

More information and resources on perinatal behavioral health can be found through the Massachusetts Bureau of Family Health and Nutrition at [www.mass.gov/service-details/postpartum-depression-resources-for-healthcare-providers](http://www.mass.gov/service-details/postpartum-depression-resources-for-healthcare-providers) and through MCPAP for Moms at [www.mcpapformoms.org](http://www.mcpapformoms.org).

For training and referral services, MCPAP for Moms provides real time, perinatal psychiatric consultation and care coordination for obstetric, pediatric, primary care, and psychiatric providers to help identify and manage depression and other mental health concerns during and after pregnancy. Resources specific to those experiencing peripartum depression, including available support groups and experienced behavioral health providers, can be found on the Postpartum

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Support International website at [www.postpartum.net](http://www.postpartum.net), which provides support for those experiencing perinatal depression. Calls to the helpline are responded to as soon as possible.

### **MassHealth Website**

This bulletin is available on the [MassHealth Provider Bulletins](#) web page.

[Sign up](#) to receive email alerts when MassHealth issues new bulletins and transmittal letters.

### **Questions**

If you have questions about the information in this bulletin, please contact the MassHealth Customer Service Center at (800) 841-2900, email your inquiry to [providersupport@mahealth.net](mailto:providersupport@mahealth.net), or fax your inquiry to (617) 988-8974.

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