

To: AmeriHealth Caritas Delaware Providers

Date: November 25th, 2025

Subject: Use of First-Line Psychosocial Care for Children and Adolescents on Antipsychotics (APP)

Summary: AmeriHealth Caritas Delaware is sharing best practice recommendations for providing first-line psychosocial care to children and adolescents who are prescribed antipsychotic medications.

Recommendation: Utilize safer first-line psychosocial interventions for nonprimary indications in children and adolescents prior to initiating antipsychotic medications.

AmeriHealth Caritas Delaware is committed to working closely with providers to improve the quality of care of our members. We use the Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS®) tool developed by the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) to reference the use of first-line psychosocial care for children and adolescents (1-17 years of age) prior to prescribing antipsychotic medications.

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Practice (AACAP) provides a best practice adherence parameter for the use of atypical antipsychotic medications in children and adolescents.⁽¹⁾ Antipsychotics are often prescribed for nonpsychotic conditions such as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and to target disruptive behaviors,⁽²⁾ whereas psychosocial interventions, at times, are not considered as first-line treatment.

The importance of first-line psychosocial care lies in its ability to enhance treatment outcomes, limit potential adverse effects, reduce off-label prescribing, and enhance the effective use of pharmacological interventions. Psychosocial interventions, such as psychotherapy and family therapy, can address the underlying issue contributing to mental health disorders and behavioral problems while building coping strategies to improve overall functioning. Furthermore, addressing psychosocial factors before medication can minimize the stigma associated with pharmacotherapy and help families feel more empowered in managing mental and behavioral health challenges.⁽³⁾

Best Practices:

- Fully assess the patient's treatment and medication history.
- Assess and appropriately diagnosis the patient.
- Use psychosocial care as first-line treatment when treatment with antipsychotics is not indicated.

- Prior to or concurrent with starting medication, begin psychosocial care as an integrated part of the treatment plan.
 - Schedule psychosocial care appointment within 30 days of prescribing medications.
 - Consider scheduling prior to the 30-day mark to account for potential missed appointments, inclement weather, transportation issues, etc.
- Assess for person-centered barriers, i.e. location, type of services and/or service providers accessible to the patient(s).
- Assess for preferences in services and/or with service providers.
- Provide education on the importance of psychosocial care.
- Provide appropriate referrals and assist with scheduling when possible.
- Engage in active coordination of care with behavioral health providers, case managers, and/or parents/guardians.
- Provide reminder communication to the patient(s).

References:

¹ *Practice parameter for the use of atypical antipsychotic medications in children and adolescents.* **Psychiatry, American Academy of Child Adolescent.** 2011, Vol. 2014.

² *Prescribing antipsychotics in child and adolescent psychiatry: guideline adherence. European child & adolescent psychiatry.* **innissen, M., Dietrich, A., van der Molen, J. H., Verhullen, A. M., Buiteveld, Y., Jongejan, S., Troost, P. W., Buitelaar, J. K., Hoekstra, P. J., & van den Hoofdakker, B. J.** 1717-1727, 2020, Vol. 29. doi:10.1007/s00787-020-01488-6.

³ **Martinez-Navarette, A., Andreu, Y., & Aguirre-Camacho, M.** Improving mental health outcomes in children and adolescents: The role of psychosocial interventions. 2019, Vol. 72.

Disclaimer: Physicians and other health care providers are solely responsible for the treatment decisions for their patients and should not use the information in this communication to substitute independent clinical judgment.

Questions: Thank you for your continued support and commitment to the care of our members. If you have questions about this communication, please get in touch with AmeriHealth Caritas Delaware Provider Services at 1-855-707-5818 or contact your Account Executive <https://www.amerihealthcaritasde.com/provider/resources/account-executives>.

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