

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Aware Initiative

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Aware is a health initiative led by the California Surgeon General and the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) to address the largely unrecognized public health crises of toxic stress stemming from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

ACEs are stressful traumatic events experienced during the first 18 years of life, and include abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction. Research shows that individuals who have experienced ACEs are at a significantly increased risk of serious health consequences, including nine of the ten leading causes of death. Identifying a history of trauma in children and adults, and providing trauma-informed care, can lower long-term health care costs, and support individual and family wellness and healing.

Provider Training

DHCS is offering provider training on trauma and trauma-informed care at ACEsAware.org. The training is a free, two (2) hour online course, and offers continuing medical education (CME) and maintenance of certificate (MOC) credit. The training includes information on:

- DHCS policies and requirements for providers
- How to screen for ACEs
- The science of trauma
- How to implement trauma-informed care in your practice

In order to continue to receive reimbursement after July 1, 2020, CenCal Health contracted providers will need to attest to having completed training through the California Department of Health Care Services trauma-informed care website or through ACEsAware.org

Providers will have to self-attest after taking the two (2) hour course directly through DHCS's online Trauma Screening Training Attestation form at www.medi-cal.ca.gov/TSTA/TSTAattest.asp . Please make a copy of your email confirmation, and email a copy of your training attestation to CenCal Health Provider Services Department at psrgroup@cencalhealth.org.

Screening Tools

Standardized screening tools include Pediatric ACEs and Related Life-Events Screener (PEARLS), and the ACEs Assessment Tool for adults. The screening tool surveys the member's history of exposure to 10 categories of ACEs by age 18. Note that the score is the total number of ACE categories experienced, and not the severity or frequency of any specific experience. The total score ranges from 0 to 10.

The screening tools are available in either identified or de-identified formats, depending on provider or patient preference. The de-identified format has members indicate total score without indicating individual categories, which is more comfortable for some patients and may improve reporting.

Clinical Practice

The ACEs Screening Clinical Algorithm helps a provider assess whether a patient is at low, intermediate, or high risk of a toxic stress pathology.

Clinical response to identified ACEs and increased risk of toxic stress should include:

- Applying the principles of trauma-informed care
- Identification and treatment of ACE-associated health conditions
- Patient education about toxic stress and interventions
- Validation of existing strengths and protective factors
- Referral to patient resources
- Follow-up as necessary

Billing

Effective January 1, 2020, CenCal Health will reimburse for annual ACEs screening for members under age 21, and once per lifetime for members ages 21 to 65. The rate is \$29 per screening for all providers.

The Healthcare Common Procedure System (HCPCS) billing codes used are:

- **G9919:** ACE score of 4 or greater, at high risk for toxic stress
- **G9920:** ACE score of 0 – 3, at lower risk for toxic stress

Billing requires that the appropriate screening tool was used, the results were reviewed, interpreted, and documented, discussed with the member and/or family, and any clinically appropriate actions were documented.

Please note that billing codes are based solely on score indicated, though clinical risk assessment and treatment planning should be based on total assessment, which includes the presence or absence of associated health conditions.

Additional Resources

Information, materials, screening tools, and training opportunities can be found at [ACEsAware.org](https://www.acesaware.org), or by emailing info@ACEsAware.org.

For more information on this service, or for help improving your clinical care, contact CenCal Health's Quality Improvement Department at qualityimprovement@cencalhealth.org.