

ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS



“Push to make your child with Autism the best, most successful person he or she can be, and you may just be surprised by the results.”

—A person with Autism

What other evaluation options are available for my child?

Psychoeducational Evaluation

If your child is school-aged, you can request that your child’s school psychologist conduct a psychoeducational evaluation to diagnose your child and to create an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) with specific accommodations and/or modifications that must be made in order for your child to have appropriate education. The cost of this evaluation is covered by the school district; it is of no cost to you.

Outpatient Provider Evaluation

A diagnosis can be obtained through a community mental health provider or a private psychiatrist, psychologist, or neuropsychologist. A licensed psychologist and/or psychiatrist will meet with your child and complete a psychological or psychiatric assessment that includes a diagnosis and recommendations for services.

Private Physician or Pediatrician

Further assessment can be obtained through your private or developmental pediatrician, neurologist, or other qualified licensed physician. This cost is often covered through commercial insurance (the private insurance that you or your spouse may receive from your employer). There may be some instances where private pay is required. It is recommended that you talk with your physician regarding your concerns.

I have heard that I can get other types of services. How do I get these services? How do I pay for them?

There are various types of behavioral health services available to children with Autism. Medical Assistance (MA) often covers these services. MA is state funding that is available if your child has a disabling diagnosis. Autism, Pervasive Developmental Disorder NOS, and Asperger’s (as well as numerous other diagnoses) are considered “disabilities.”

I have heard of Medical Assistance (MA). What is it?

Pennsylvania has a unique system in which parents of a disabled child can qualify for Medical Assistance regardless of the parents’ income. In other words, services traditionally provided only to individuals who fall below a certain income level are available to children diagnosed with a disability regardless of the family’s income. Medical Assistance pays for many of the services commonly provided to children with Autism.

How can my child qualify for Medical Assistance?

In order to be eligible for Medical Assistance, your child must have an assessment and be diagnosed with a disability that qualifies him or her for this benefit. The list of qualifying diagnoses can be found on the Web at <http://www.ssa.gov/disability/professionals/bluebook>. Such diagnoses include, but aren't limited to, Autism, Pervasive Developmental Disorder, and Asperger's Disorder. The most common ways of obtaining a diagnosis are mentioned above.

How do I obtain Medical Assistance for my disabled child?

In order to apply for Medical Assistance you must complete an application form, the PA-600. The quickest way to obtain an application form is to call your local County Assistance Office. You can also apply online using the COMPASS application.

What other information might help me complete the application form?

It helps to write "MA for the disabled child" at the top of the first page. Even though only your child is being reviewed, all persons in the household should be listed, including their birth dates. The Social Security numbers of the parents and the child should be included.

Parental income is not taken into account. However, your child's income, if any, is taken into account when reviewing eligibility. Verification of your child's income should be included. This includes any resources that generate income, such as interest on bank accounts in your child's name. Effective September 1, 2000, court-ordered child support and Social Security Survivor's benefits for the child are not considered.

Even though parental income is not considered, the implementation of Act 7A/2002 requires that the custodial parent or legally responsible adult provide this information in the application. Medical Assistance (MA) will be denied if the information is not provided. This income information is used to determine whether a parent must apply for Supplemental Security Income/ Social Security Disability income (SSI/SSD) for the child through the Social Security Office.



Autism is the third most common developmental disability following Mental Retardation and Cerebral Palsy—it is more common than Multiple Sclerosis, Cystic Fibrosis, or childhood cancer.

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Behavioral therapies and medical interventions are some of the treatments effectively being used for individuals with Autism.

What other information might help me complete the application form? (continued)

If your child is covered under any medical insurance, this should be noted on the application. A copy of the front and back sides of insurance cards should be sent. Medical documentation of the child's disability should be attached to the application, including diagnosis, severity, duration of disability, impact on child's functioning, and current treatment plan. This information is required by the Medical Review Team (MRT) who will determine the disability in the event SSI/SSDI benefits are rejected based on parental resources. This documentation must be signed by a medical doctor (MD), psychiatrist, or psychologist. (See note below.)

What criteria must my child meet to qualify as a disabled child?

To qualify as a disabled child, your child must meet one of the following criteria:

- Receiving Social Security Disability (SSD) benefits.
- Certified disabled based on SSDI/SSI criteria. This is done by the MRT in Harrisburg. No disability decision is made at the county level. A medical evaluation is authorized if all verifications are received and eligibility is established in all areas except medical determination. The MRT reviews the child's case using the same criteria as the Social Security Administration (SSA). MRT sends certification or rejection of disability to the County Assistance Office. If rejected, the County Assistance Office must send a notice to close.
- Received SSD/SSI and was certified disabled. If the SSA terminated for reasons other than disability, there is no need to recertify if the disability certificate is still valid.

NOTE: The County Assistance Office is not requiring that parents go to the Social Security Office to receive a denial letter unless their monthly income is under \$3,000 per month. This is a change—previously parents were required to obtain the letter from SSA before authorization. In some cases, clients may be required to apply for SSI if income is between \$3,000-\$5,000. The County Assistance Office will make a referral to Social Security and a representative will contact the parents.

How does the verification process work?

An interview is not required and everything can be done by phone or mail. If verifications are incomplete or missing, the caseworker will contact the parents.

Cases are reviewed once a year by mail and/or phone. Parents are sent a form to update their child's case. The form must be completed and returned, along with any requested verifications.

Are MA benefits retroactive?

The effective date of eligibility is the date the application is received and date-stamped in the County Assistance Office. If a parent is requesting retroactive medical coverage for a previous medical expense in the three months prior to the effective date, the parent must submit medical documentation that the disability existed during that period.

The retroactive period cannot be approved until the MRT certifies that the child has met SSA disability criteria. Ongoing medical coverage can be authorized with the MRT certification pending but not retroactive coverage.

Will my child be enrolled in an Health Management Organization (HMO)?

Children receiving MA will be enrolled in an HMO, a Medicaid Fee-for-Service program, or a HIPP program. These HMOs and Fee-for-Service programs provide benefits for the physical health of your child. Community Care manages all behavioral health services.

HIPP stands for Health Insurance Premium Payment. A child will qualify for HIPP if he or she is an active Medical Assistance (MA) recipient who has access to medical insurance through employment (or the family's employment). HIPP representatives conduct a cost analysis based on who is eligible for the employer insurance, the amount of the premium, and the policy benefits. If the anticipated MA costs of the clients are greater than the cost of the employer insurance, the child is enrolled in a HIPP program.

Will I need to reapply once my child is receiving MA?

Eligibility for a child receiving MA must be reviewed at yearly intervals. The new PA600-CH-L is used along with a letter from the caseworker explaining the review process. Parental income must be reported at reapplication, along with other information required by Act 7A.



*“Autism is happy
and sad. I like
Autism. Autism
makes me different
from my friends.
That’s OK.”*

—A person with Autism

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Specialist education and structured support can really make a difference to the life of a person with Autism, helping to maximize skills and achieve full potential.

What information is needed to meet the Act 7A requirement?

For the Department of Public Welfare to submit an annual report to the General Assembly as part of the requirements of Act 7A, the following information is needed from families applying for “MA for the Disabled Child”:

- Family size (parent’s statement).
- Household income (parent’s statement). Parents must verify their income.
- County of residence (parent’s statement).
- Length of residence in PA (parent’s statement).
- Third-party insurance information (insurance card needed).
- Diagnosis.

Who is responsible for the documentation?

When applying for Medical Assistance under the disabled child provision, it is the parent or guardian’s responsibility to assemble documentation of the child’s disability or condition. It is not enough for a child to have a disability, a specific diagnosis, or an IEP in order to qualify for Medical Assistance under the disabled child provision. The child’s disability must meet the Social Security childhood disability standards. The disability verification is sent to the Medical Review Team (MRT) to review for a disability determination.

It is necessary for parents to provide documentation of the nature, severity, frequency, and duration of the limitations in addition to the medical or psychiatric condition that causes the limitations (diagnosis). Important sources of documentation include the child’s doctors, therapists, teachers, guidance counselors, and school records. IEPs are not enough because they focus only on educational issues.

Psychologists certified by the Pennsylvania Department of Education or licensed by the state of Pennsylvania can provide the necessary documentation for a disability determination for a child applying for Medical Assistance under the disabled child provision.