



Services for Children with Complex Behavioral Health Needs

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services recently made policy changes in order to better service children with complex behavioral health needs. The agency took this action in response to a complaint Disability Rights NC filed alleging that NC DHHS was not meeting its obligations to these children.

For this fact sheet, **children with complex needs** are those who meet these four criteria:

1. They have been diagnosed with an intellectual and/or developmental disability (I/DD) including autism and a mental illness,
2. They are at risk of not being able to enter or remain in a community setting (that is, they are institutionalized or are at risk of being institutionalized),
3. They have Medicaid, and
4. They are 5 years old to 20 years old (eligibility ends on one's 21st birthday).

These children are covered by a provision in federal Medicaid law called for Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment Services (EPSDT). This provision requires NC DHHS to provide the children with "necessary health care, diagnostic services, treatment and other measures in order to correct or ameliorate defects and physical and mental illnesses and conditions discovered by the screening services."

Seven LME/MCOs (local management entities/managed care organizations) administer these services. See the attached map to find the LME/MCO that serves your county.

The settlement agreement between NC DHHS and Disability Rights NC guarantees the following services for children who meet the four criteria listed above.

Access to Help – Almost anyone who works with or is related to a child can call the local LME/MCO to talk about whether the child may have complex needs. This includes family members, pediatricians, social workers, school employees, and employees the Department of Social Services or the Department of Juvenile Justice.

The LME/MCO staff will assess the child's indicators and risk factors. If the child meets the "complex needs" criteria, the LME/MCO will give him to a Care Coordinator to begin

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services. Those who do not meet the criteria but qualify for other services will receive referrals for those services.

In addition, families throughout the state facing a crisis involving a child with complex needs have access to NC START (Systemic, Therapeutic Assessment, Respite and Treatment). This is a comprehensive program that provides community-based crisis prevention and intervention services for individuals with I/DD and challenging behaviors, often with a co-occurring mental illness. You can access NC START through the LME/MCO.

Beginning in April 2017, families also will be able to access an Outpatient Assessment Clinic at the Murdoch Developmental Center in Butner. The clinic staff will include clinicians who have expertise in working with children with complex needs, and they will work the LME/MCO to ensure that the child gets the necessary services.

Assessments – A comprehensive assessment is essential to ensure that a child has the right diagnoses and receives the right services. A licensed or credentialed professional who has experience diagnosing and treating individuals with I/DD and mental health issues must conduct the child’s assessment. In addition, the professional doing the assessment must not be a direct employee of an LME/MCO.

Case Management – Navigating the services and supports a child needs can be difficult—especially when different agencies and systems are involved. A Case Manager is an expert in helping families access medical, behavioral, social, and other services they need.

If you have trouble getting services for a child with complex needs, please contact Rachel Johnson, the State Coordinator for Children with Complex Needs, at Rachel.Johnson@dhhs.nc.gov or 919-715-2771, or call Disability Rights NC at the number below.

Disability Rights North Carolina is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization headquartered in Raleigh. It is a federally mandated protection and advocacy system with funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Education, and the Social Security Administration.

Its team of attorneys, advocates, paralegals and support staff provide advocacy and legal services at no charge for people with disabilities across North Carolina to protect them from discrimination on the basis of their disability. All people with disabilities living in North Carolina are eligible to receive assistance from Disability Rights NC.

Contact us for assistance or to request this information in an alternate format.

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