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## North Sound Behavioral Health Organization

### Section 1500 – Clinical: Access to Outpatient Behavioral Health Services

Authorizing Source: 42 CFR 438.206; WAC 388-877A-0130; DSHS Contracts; North Sound BHO Contracts

Cancels:

See Also:

Providers must comply with this policy and may develop individualized implementation guidelines as needed

Approved by: Executive Director

Responsible Staff: Deputy Director

Signature:

Date: 8/11/2016

## **POLICY #1503.00**

### **SUBJECT: ACCESS TO OUTPATIENT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES**

#### **PURPOSE**

To provide individuals with timely access to clinically appropriate behavioral health services.

**Note:** This policy pertains only to access to outpatient behavioral health services. For details regarding access to crisis services, see Policy #1704, Crisis Services – general policy (<http://nsmha.org/Policies/Sections/1700/1704.00.pdf>). For details regarding inpatient mental health treatment, see Policy #1571, Inpatient certification and authorization (<http://nsmha.org/Policies/Sections/1500/1571.00.pdf>). For access to other specific programs, please consult the policy pertaining to that program.

#### **POLICY**

The North Sound Behavioral Health Organization (North Sound BHO) maintains a regional Access Line that provides a centralized point of contact by which individuals can request services within the North Sound region. This service is provided by Volunteers of America (VOA.) Individuals may also access services by directly contacting the Behavioral Health Agency (BHA) of their choice. Individuals calling to request services will be assisted in a manner that is friendly, flexible, proactive and responsive.

The North Sound BHO or its contracted BHAs shall not discriminate against individuals who have challenges in receiving services (including, but not limited to, individuals who have a history of dangerous behavior, or who do not have housing) and will serve qualifying individuals in alternate programs when the preferred or most appropriate placement is not available.

Should a BHA decide to enact a policy to refuse services based on moral or religious grounds, the BHA must notify North Sound BHO at least 30 days prior to enacting such a policy.

#### **Geographical accessibility:**

The North Sound BHO will contract with provider agencies to maintain a network across the BHO service area to ensure when individuals must travel to service sites, there is a location meeting the following standards:

1. In rural areas, service sites will be located within a 30-minute commute time from the individual's home. (Rural areas are those with a population density of at least 20 and less than 500 people per square mile.)
2. In large rural geographic areas (e.g. ferry transportation issues), service sites are accessible within a 90-minute commute time. (Large rural areas are those with a population density of less than 20 people per square mile.)

3. In urban areas, service sites are accessible by public transportation. (Urban areas are those with a population density of at least 500 people per square mile.)
4. In the following situations travel standards do not apply: a) when the individual opts to use service sites that require travel beyond the standards; b) under exceptional circumstances (e.g. inclement weather, hazardous road conditions due to accidents or road construction, public transportation shortages, delayed ferry service).

## **PROCEDURE**

Individuals seeking to initiate outpatient or residential behavioral health services can make this request by calling the VOA Access Line at 1-888-693-7200 Monday – Friday, 8 am – 5 pm or by directly calling a BHA during business hours. (Crisis behavioral health services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, by calling the VOA Care Crisis Line at 1-800-584-3578.)

BHAs may at their discretion require that someone requesting services on behalf of another individual have the legal authority to consent for treatment. However, for the purposes of care coordination, the following professionals may initiate the request for an assessment for an individual:

1. Facility (inpatient psychiatric, substance use residential, jail, prison, etc.) discharge or release planners;
2. Apple Health Managed Care Organization (MCO) Care Managers;
3. Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) referral and/or referral from Primary Care Provider (PCP).

While the assessment appointment may be requested and scheduled by one (1) of these professionals, the individual for whom care is being sought or their legal representative, must still provide consent to assessment and treatment prior to delivery of services including assessment.

Individuals who are already enrolled in outpatient behavioral health services with a North Sound BHO contracted provider and want additional services or to transfer to another BHA can access additional services in the following way:

1. If they are currently enrolled in Substance Use Disorder (SUD) treatment and are seeking mental health treatment, they may call the VOA Access Line or the BHA of their choosing to request services.
2. If they are currently enrolled in mental health treatment and are seeking SUD treatment, they may call the VOA Access Line or the BHA of their choosing to request services.
3. If they are enrolled in treatment and would like to transfer providers or add an additional service for the same type of diagnosis (e.g. someone enrolled in SUD treatment wishes to receive an additional SUD service), they should discuss this with their current Behavioral Health Care Provider; coordination of network services or transfers within the network shall follow North Sound BHO Policy #1510, Intra-Network Transfers and Coordination of Care (<http://nsmha.org/Policies/Sections/1500/1510.00.pdf>).

### **Requests for service through VOA and BHAs with scheduled assessment appointments:**

Individuals/families seeking behavioral health services with a North Sound BHO-contracted BHA shall be assisted by staff that is adept at triage and screening functions and responsive to the requester's identified needs. When an individual contacts VOA or a BHA that uses scheduled assessment appointments to request an intake assessment:

1. The first level of screening will be for safety concerns. If a crisis response is needed, the caller will be immediately connected to VOA Care Crisis Line (1-800-584-3578) where behavioral health clinicians are available for phone consultation. Face-to-face outreach is available if indicated.
2. The next level of screening will be for financial eligibility. Those individuals who have Washington Apple Health that covers behavioral health services, per ProviderOne, may not be denied an initial assessment and shall be scheduled by the provider agency for an initial assessment. Individuals who meet other funding priorities for assessment as identified in North Sound BHO Policy #1574 State and Substance Abuse Block Grant Funding Plan (<http://nsmha.org/Policies/Sections/1500/1574.00.pdf>) are also offered an initial assessment appointment.
  - a. Individuals whose eligibility is not yet reflected in ProviderOne but who have written documentation from the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) that verifies the appropriate eligibility, are considered eligible for assessment. Prior to providing the first ongoing appointment, eligibility is expected to be reflected in ProviderOne or the individual may not be eligible for ongoing services.
  - b. Individuals whose ProviderOne eligibility reflects a BHO benefit but are not assigned to the North Sound BHO should be asked where they live. If they live or are imminently moving to Snohomish, Skagit, Whatcom, Island, or San Juan Counties, they should be allowed to schedule an appointment. Individuals' ProviderOne records should reflect a North Sound region Community Services Office (CSO) for them to be considered financially eligible to begin services. (They are considered eligible regardless of the BHO assignment at that time.) If the individual arrives without a North Sound CSO assignment, the BHA is encouraged to assist them in updating their address with ProviderOne. Individuals who are homeless in the region are considered to reside in this region. The North Sound BHO may on a case-by-case basis agree to provide services to individuals residing in other regions if they are geographically better able to access the North Sound provider network.
  - c. Individuals/families that are identified during this initial screening as needing assistance to obtain Washington Apple Health will be referred to DSHS as appropriate.
3. Once the determination has been made that the individual is not in need of crisis services and is eligible for an initial assessment, the nature and purpose of this assessment shall be clearly explained.
  - a. The purpose of the assessment appointment is to determine whether the individual meets eligibility, per Washington State Access to Care Standards (ACS), for ongoing behavioral health services.
  - b. Individuals are encouraged to bring natural supports to the initial assessment to assist with the provision of support and information and to establish the format for consumer-driven support teams and continued involvement of natural supports. They are also encouraged to bring any records available to them in order to assist in the assessment process. Individuals shall be asked about any special accommodations that are needed at the assessment appointment. Accommodations shall be made for barriers of language or disability.
  - c. If an individual's explanation of their presenting problem indicates they may not meet ACS, VOA or a BHA may advise them their needs may be better met through their Washington Apple Health MCO. If the financially eligible individual prefers to request assessment through the BHA, they may not be denied that assessment.

4. Individuals shall be offered an assessment appointment within required timelines and other accessibility standards. If the request for services (RFS) was made through the VOA Access Line, VOA staff shall connect the individual by phone to the requested BHA to schedule the appointment.

a. Required timelines:

- i. Standard assessment appointments should be offered within 10 business days of the RFS.
- ii. Individuals requiring expedited assessment appointments should be offered an assessment within three (3) business days of the RFS.

Expedited assessments are required when following the standard timeframe could result in the individual presenting a risk of harm to themselves or others or when the individual's present behavioral health condition affects their ability to attain, maintain, or regain maximum function. Examples of when this may be the case include:

- 1) Individuals discharging from a hospital;
  - 2) Individuals discharging from residential SUD treatment;
  - 3) Individuals being released from incarceration;
  - 4) Individuals who do not meet criteria for emergent or urgent care through the Care Crisis Line but who are unstable or at risk to the degree that it is likely they would require hospitalization if not offered an assessment within three (3) business days.
- iii. Individuals who are discharging from inpatient psychiatric care or residential SUD treatment should be offered an assessment within seven (7) calendar days.

b. Other accessibility standards

- i. Individuals who do not request or call directly to a specific BHA shall be informed of the BHAs available in their area and offered an initial assessment through a North Sound BHO network BHA that:
  - 1) Is geographically accessible within distance and travel time standards as noted above in the Policy section. Individuals may choose to use providers that require travel beyond the travel standards.
  - 2) Provides services for their age group.
- ii. If an individual is unable to get to an office-based assessment due to the individual's behavioral health issue(s), disability, lack of transportation, incarceration, or other barriers, assessments shall be established at other locations as needed.
- iii. Children and parents may choose to receive services from the same provider when appropriate and available.

- iv. Individuals age 18-20 may choose to receive services from either a child/youth or adult serving BHA.
  - v. Requests for Wraparound with Intensive Services (WISe) shall be directed to a WISe-certified BHA.
- c. RFS for individuals discharging from a facility when the discharge or release date is not established or is beyond the designated timeline for assessments shall follow the process outlined below:

Requester contacts the BHA where the individual will be seen for an assessment to determine availability of and eligibility for the specific services being requested, to coordinate continuity of care and identify an assessment date. The BHA may treat the request as pending and record the RFS date as the discharge or release date.

### **Requests for Service Directly to a BHA with Open Access Assessment Appointments**

For RFS directly to BHAs providing open access assessment appointments, certain aspects of the procedure outlined for scheduled assessment appointments will be different. However, unless specifically noted in the following section, the procedure outlined above for scheduled appointments applies.

1. Individuals who walk into a BHA **and** are seen the same day do not need to be screened for safety concerns prior to the assessment. Safety concerns shall be reviewed during the assessment.

The BHA **must** screen for safety concerns if they are unable to see an individual the same day.

2. Some circumstances require scheduled assessment appointments including individuals:
  - a. Needing an outreach appointment;
  - b. Needing interpreter services; or
  - c. Discharging from Western State Hospital (WSH) or inpatient psychiatric care on a court order if the court requires a scheduled assessment date.
3. Individuals who present for an open access assessment appointment but who are unable to sign for consent for treatment for themselves, will be assisted by the BHA in obtaining signed consent and other applicable documentation (e.g., guardianship papers) quickly so they can be seen the same day if possible.
4. The BHAs will have a contingency plan in place for each site offering open access assessments to minimize the instances of individuals being asked to return on a different day. The BHAs will ensure individuals who are asked to return on a different day due to capacity issues are not turned away a second time. When there are more individuals presenting for same-day assessment appointments than available appointments, the BHAs shall:
  - a. Conduct safety screening with individuals who will not be seen that day and connect individuals with crisis services as necessary.
  - b. While prioritization may not always be possible based on timing and other factors, if the BHA must choose between multiple individuals who are awaiting assessment, the BHA will prioritize those:
    - i. Who would otherwise be eligible for a crisis service or expedited assessment appointment;
    - ii. Discharging or releasing from an institutional facility; or

- iii. For whom it would result in undue hardship to return on another day.

### **Requests for Service (RFS)**

A request for behavioral health services occurs when services are sought or applied for through a telephone call, walk-in, or written request. The BHAs or VOA Access Line submit a request for service when:

An individual calls VOA or a BHA to obtain a scheduled assessment appointment (e.g. at a BHA that uses scheduled appointments OR because the individual requires a scheduled appointment for the reasons above) OR an individual walks in to request an open access intake evaluation.

Information on assessment requirements and authorization or denial of services is found in North Sound BHO Policies 1504.00 – Assessment for Ongoing Services (<http://nsmha.org/Policies/Sections/1500/1504.00.pdf>) and 1505.00 – Authorization for Ongoing Outpatient Services (<http://nsmha.org/Policies/Sections/1500/1505.00.pdf>).

### **Monitoring of access to services:**

Access to services shall be monitored by the North Sound BHO utilizing data including, but not limited to:

1. Volume of RFS;
2. RFS and RFS – Additional Information transactions
3. Referral Source;
4. Call disposition if no assessment is offered;
5. Timeliness of assessment appointments including:
  - a. First offered assessment appointment including reasons why an appointment was not offered within required timelines, if applicable;
  - b. First accepted assessment appointment;
  - c. First Offered/Referral transaction;
  - d. Assessment appointment information.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

None