TRICARE Quick Reference for BCBAs

Covers TRICARE West (TriWest) and East (Humana Military). The Autism Care Demonstration rules are the same in both regions; only the portal and contacts differ. Rules are subject to change.

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01 Answers to the questions we get most

How long is an authorization?
6 months, assessment and treatment both.

How many assessment hours?
Initial: 32 units (8 hours). Reassessment: 24 units (6 hours). Fixed; you do not request a number.

How many parent training sessions?
At least 6 per 6 months under 97156 or 97157. First within 30 days of each authorization start.

Can a BCaBA bill 97155?
No. Assistants can render when delegated; only the authorized supervisor or ACSP bills.

Can I deliver 97153 at school?
ABA supervisor only, with a current IEP, short-term, with a fade plan, no academic goals.

Parent training by telehealth?
97156 only, after the first six-month authorization. Use GT or 95.

Who fills in the DSM-5 checklist?
The diagnosing provider. Never Alpaca, never the BCBA.

Is a provisional diagnosis OK?
No. TRICARE requires a definitive ASD diagnosis.

Can an authorization be backdated?
No.

Timely filing deadline?
365 days from date of service.

02 Codes, caps, and who can render

The ACD covers only 97151, 97153, 97155, 97156, 97157, 97158, plus 99366 and 99368. 97152 and 97154 are not covered. One unit is 15 minutes.

Code	Who may render	Max per day	Key limits	Telehealth
97151	Supervisor; assistant if delegated	DHA MUE	32 units initial, 24 reassessment, all inside a 14-day window	No
97151-99	Supervisor only	1 unit per measure	Vineland-3, SRS-2, PSI-4-SF, SIPA. Separate authorization via treatment plan update.	GT if remote
97153	Supervisor, assistant, or technician. School: supervisor only.	32 units (8 h)	160 units (40 h) per Sunday–Saturday week. No rollover.	No
97155	Supervisor; assistant if delegated	8 units (2 h)	Supervisor must personally deliver 1 session per calendar month, or a 10% penalty applies to every claim in the 6-month period	No
97156	Supervisor; assistant if delegated	8 units (2 h)	Home or clinic. 6 sessions per 6 months with 97157.	After first 6 months
97157	Supervisor; assistant if delegated	6 units (1.5 h)	Max 8 participants. Clinic only.	No
97158	Supervisor; assistant if delegated	6 units (1.5 h)	Max 8 participants	No
99366 / 99368	Supervisor	1 per authorization	3+ professionals from different specialties; Autism Services Navigator present throughout	Yes

Only authorized ABA supervisors and ACSPs can bill. Assistants and technicians are never the billing provider. A QASP-S is assistant level under TRICARE, not a supervisor.

03 Outcome measures

No treatment authorization is issued until all of these are complete with valid scores. Submit the full publisher report or hand-scored protocol. Scores embedded in the treatment plan are rejected. Renewals must be done within 90 days of their due date or they are cancelled and must be repeated unpaid.

Measure	Ages	Before services	Then
PDDBI Parent	1.5 to 18.5	Yes	Every 6 months
PDDBI Teacher	1.5 to 18.5	No	From first reassessment, every 6 months
Vineland-3	0 to 90	Yes	Annually
SRS-2	2.5 to 99	Yes	Annually
PSI-4-SF	0 to 12y11m	Yes	Every 6 months
SIPA	11 to 19y11m	Yes	Every 6 months

Ages 11 to 12y11m take either PSI-4-SF or SIPA. Over 12y11m, SIPA only. Name the respondent and their relationship on every form, consistently.

04 Deadlines

Event	Deadline
Assessment starts	Within 28 days of referral verification
Assessment completes	Within 14 calendar days of first service date
Treatment begins	Within 28 days of completed assessment
First parent training	Within 30 days of every authorization start
Response to document request or plan modification	10 calendar days, or the request is cancelled
Reauthorization submission	60 to 30 days before expiry
Annual ACD provider training	By December 31, or 10% penalty on every claim

05 Concurrent billing

The rule behind all of it: the child cannot be present for two services at the same time. Concurrency needs two different rendering providers, separate locations (two rooms in one building counts), session times in military format on separate claim lines, and every participant named.

	97151	97153	97155	97156	97157	97158
97151	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
97153	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
97155	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
97156	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
97157	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
97158	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No

97153 and 97155 at the same time: only the higher rate is reimbursed. When you join a technician's session to modify protocol, the 97153 timer stops.

06 What you cannot bill

- Supervision or training of technicians, IEP meetings, team meetings, emails, phone calls, drive time or mileage
- Report writing beyond the assessment code; preparing supplies or stimuli
- Goals for daily living, academics, or vocational skills, in any setting, including school
- Goals belonging to another specialty, or unrelated to core ASD symptoms
- Camps, sporting events, travel in a vehicle, or time during another medical appointment
- Restraints, aversive techniques, or any form of psychotherapy
- Group services billed as one-to-one; services while the child is asleep; care delivered by the child's own caregiver

07 The referral, and what the plan needs

A complete referral has three parts, and you complete none of them: the referral with a definitive ASD diagnosis and date, the DHA DSM-5-TR checklist from the diagnosing provider, and a signed validated assessment tool. TRICARE accepts five tools, not just the ADOS: ADI-R, ADOS-2, GARS-3, STAT, CARS-2. Referrals last two years and are replaced up to six months early.

Using the Alpaca-generated treatment plan will ensure you meet the plan criteria, and Alpaca's AI session notes capture TRICARE's required note elements. The two things only you can supply: name the specific service location for each code, and write caregiver goals that measure the caregiver's behaviour, not the child's.

08 Who does what at Alpaca

Task	Owner
DSM-5-TR checklist and ACD referral	The diagnosing provider. Alpaca cannot complete them and neither can you.
Parent-signature forms (Appointment of Representative, Change of Provider, appeals)	Alpaca, via PandaDoc. Do not send your own version.
Authorization and amendment submissions	Alpaca. Wait for an approved authorization before amending.
Outcome measures	Treating BCBA, submitted with the authorization request
Comprehensive Care Plan	Autism Services Navigator and family, shared through Availity. Yours to chase.
Primary vs secondary insurance changes	Alpaca. Never change this yourself.