

One Assessment for Level of Care Assessment for Youth Behavioral Health Inpatient and Residential Services

42 CFR Part 441 Subpart D requires state Medicaid programs to have an independent team certify the need for services when a youth under age 21 is admitted to inpatient psychiatric services. Inpatient psychiatric services include services provided in hospitals and psychiatric residential treatment facilities (PRTF). ND Medicaid also issues a level of care for youth served in Qualified Residential Treatment Programs (QRTPs).

On July 1, 2024, the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services (NDHHS) began using One Assessment for youth entering inpatient or residential behavioral health treatment.

What is the one assessment?

The one assessment is a streamlined approach to assessing level of care. Under the one assessment, referrals for inpatient or residential behavioral health treatment go through one evaluation process. An independent vendor assesses the level of care, completes independent interviews with youth and families, and reviews medical documentation. The one assessment is designed to limit bias to ensure that clinical criteria are applied appropriately and consistently for all youth across North Dakota.

Why did NDHHS make this change?

Prior to the one assessment, North Dakota had separate entry points and review processes for PRTF and QRTP levels of care. The separate processes were fragmented and resulted in multiple assessments and dual determinations for the same youth. Additionally, the review and documentation process differed substantially between settings. PRTF reviews were based on narrative documentation only and referral information was submitted by the PRTF provider while QRTP reviews included interviews with families and youth. The differences in documentation and review requirements resulted in inconsistent application of clinical criteria across the state. The new process for one assessment is centered around streamlining the point of entry for youth and families, applying clinical criteria consistently, and ensuring that care is provided in the least restrictive, most appropriate setting.

Did clinical criteria change?

No, the one assessment is a process change only and did not change the clinical criteria for PRTF or QRTP admission. The clinical criteria for PRTFs were updated in June 2023 and providers were trained in the criteria at that time and have had a year to adjust to the clinical criteria. The one assessment adds independent verification of clinical criteria and provider submitted information through review of clinical notes and an interview with youth and families but does not change the certificate of need (CON) clinical requirements in place prior to the one assessment.

How does this change impact the care of kids?

The new assessment will allow better supports for youth and families entering treatment service by streamlining entry and ensuring the right care at the right time, provided in the least restrictive, most appropriate setting. The one assessment creates an opportunity for NDHHS to assist families who do not qualify for PRTF level of care to identify other treatment options and resources in the community. NDHHS will also have more data related to youth entering services to allow the state to monitor and identify trends related to service delivery across the continuum of care.

What has NDHHS done to help facilities and families?

NDHHS has collaborated with providers and families to navigate changing processes. NDHHS provided multiple educational sessions to providers before, during, and after implementation of the One Assessment, with opportunities to provide feedback and ask clarifying questions. NDHHS has added a Behavioral Health Navigator to support families in determining the right source of care. NDHHS continues to assess the behavioral health landscape of North Dakota and has included stakeholders in discussions to consider further enhancements to ensure youth have the right care at the right time, provided in the least restrictive, most appropriate setting.
