



Care Provider Training:

Alcohol Misuse Screening and Behavioral Counseling Interventions in Primary Care

Per California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) Policy Letter APL 18-014 and United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) guidelines, federal law requires primary care providers (PCPs) to provide Alcohol Misuse Screening and Behavioral Counseling Interventions to patients ages 18 and older who misuse alcohol. Please follow these requirements when screening UnitedHealthcare Community Plan members for alcohol misuse.

Defining Alcohol Misuse

USPSTF recommends screening adults ages 18 and older for alcohol misuse and providing patients engaged in risky or hazardous drinking with brief behavioral counseling interventions to reduce alcohol misuse. USPSTF defines “alcohol misuse” as a spectrum of behaviors, including risky or hazardous alcohol use, such as harmful alcohol use and alcohol abuse or dependence. Risky or hazardous alcohol use means drinking more than the recommended daily, weekly or per-occasion quantity of alcohol, which can result in increased risk for adverse health consequences.

Alcohol Misuse Screening

When screening UnitedHealthcare Community Plan members, ages 18 and older, for alcohol misuse, we recommend using all of the following tools:

1. The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT)
2. The abbreviated AUDIT-Consumption (AUDIT-C)
3. A single-question screening, such as asking, “How many times in the past year have you had four (for women and all adults ages 65 and older) or five or more (for men) drinks in a day?”

You can request copies of the tools by emailing uhccscaqualitydepartment_dl@ds.uhc.com.

Although PCPs must provide one alcohol misuse screening per year, additional screenings must be provided when medically necessary.

Behavioral Counseling Interventions for Alcohol Misuse

PCPs must offer members brief behavioral counseling interventions to reduce alcohol misuse when, during the screening process, a member is identified as engaging in risky or hazardous drinking. Behavioral counseling interventions for alcohol misuse vary in their specific components, administration, length and number of interactions, but may include cognitive behavioral strategies, such as action plans, drinking diaries, stress management or problem solving. PCPs must offer at least one (up to a maximum of three) behavioral counseling intervention(s) for alcohol misuse per year.

Referral to Mental Health and/or Alcohol Use Disorder Services

PCPs must help ensure members who meet the criteria for an Alcohol Use Disorder, as defined by the current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5 or as amended), are

referred to the county department for alcohol and substance use disorder treatment services – or a DHCS certified treatment program – for evaluation and treatment. PCPs must also document alcohol misuse screenings in members’ medical records. Additionally, when a member transfers from one PCP to another, the new PCP must obtain the member’s prior medical records, including those pertaining to the provision of the preventive services.

We’re Here to Help

If you have questions, please email our Quality Department at uhccscaqualitydepartment_dl@ds.uhc.com. Thank you.