Supporting primary care physicians in helping patients with alcohol abuse issues

Aetna Alcohol Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment program

The Aetna Alcohol Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) program supports primary care physicians (PCPs) in screening for alcohol abuse, providing brief intervention and referring individuals to treatment.

The program incorporates the evidence-based protocol established by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA).

The program is open to participating PCPs treating any patient who is 18 or older and has Aetna medical benefits.

We want to help improve patient outcomes

The program aims to improve the quality of care for patients with substance abuse conditions. And to improve outcomes for patients, families and communities. Our goal is to increase the use of alcohol screening, brief intervention and the referral to treatment process in PCP offices.

Substance abuse represents a significant problem in the United States. About three in ten adults in the U.S. drink at levels that elevate their risk for physical, mental health and social problems. Of these individuals, about one in four has alcohol abuse or dependence issues.¹

Scientific knowledge about evidence-based therapies to treat substance abuse conditions has increased substantially.\(^2\) Clinical trials have demonstrated that brief intervention can reduce drinking levels in at-risk individuals who are not alcohol dependent.\(^1\)

Many patients will not self-identify as having a substance abuse issue. Or they may not have developed a detectable problem. That’s why screening is helpful in identifying patients who need intervention.\(^3\)

**How the Aetna SBIRT program works**

The program follows the steps outlined by the NIAAA in *Helping Patients Who Drink Too Much: A Clinician’s Guide.*

**Step 1:**
Screening begins with a single question about heavy drinking days. And patients are given the option to use a self-reporting instrument — such as the alcohol use disorders identification test (AUDIT).

**Step 2:**
The doctor completes an assessment to determine if the patient has an abnormal pattern of alcohol use. And if that use causes clinically significant impairment or distress.

**Step 3:**
Then the doctor makes a recommendation based on the extent and severity of all alcohol-related symptoms.

**Step 4:**
The doctor includes reinforcement and support of continued adherence to recommendations in follow-up visits.

**Other program resources**
To learn about medication-assisted treatment, check out the NIAAA’s *Helping Patients Who Drink Too Much: A Clinician’s Guide.*

**Program reimbursement details**
The initial screening and brief intervention are considered for reimbursement (note: reimbursement for capitated membership is included in capitation payments). The PCP’s office can bill for each screen by submitting:

- **99408:** Alcohol and/or substance (other than tobacco) abuse structured screening (for example, AUDIT, drug abuse screening test [DAST]) and brief intervention (SBI) services of 15 to 30 minutes
- **99409:** Alcohol and/or substance (other than tobacco) abuse structured screening (for example, AUDIT, DAST) and SBI services greater than 30 minutes. Member’s copay will apply.

**To start the Aetna SBIRT program** — simply follow the steps in the NIAAA guide to begin the process.

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