



## **Guardian Information - CMS School-Based Mental Health (SBMH) Program**

### **What is the SBMH program?**

The SBMH program is a collaboration between CMS, Mecklenburg County, and seven local mental health agencies. The mental health therapists are located in schools and provide outpatient mental health therapy to students during the instructional day.

### **When should SBMH services be considered?**

There are often two types of referrals for SBMH. First, a student who struggles with ongoing behavior-emotional issues in school after having received school-based interventions. Second, a student who may not have displayed any issues in school; however, the student is experiencing *intense* mental health needs beyond what can be addressed with school counseling (e.g., the student has experienced a significant trauma or loss). The student is either experiencing behavioral-emotional issues in school or is highly likely to experience them if mental health needs go unaddressed.

### **How do referrals to the SBMH program occur?**

A school staff member, a guardian, or the student themselves expresses concern about the student's behavior-emotional wellbeing to a student services staff member. If the concerns indicate significant mental health challenges may be present, a student services staff member contacts the guardian and explains the program. If the guardian wants a referral to occur, they will need to sign the CMS Consent for Release of Information form, and CMS staff will submit a referral to the agency. The agency will then contact the guardian by phone to verify insurance and schedule the intake assessment.

### **Important points to understand about the SBMH program:**

- Students are referred for outpatient mental health therapy, similar to outpatient therapy that would occur in a mental health clinic or office, but the location of the therapy sessions will instead occur at school
- The program is a partnership between CMS and the assigned agency, if the guardian agrees to the referral, they understand that CMS will share information about their child with the assigned agency
- The guardian will be contacted by the agency to gather insurance information and to verify insurance benefits; there may be associated costs for this service and those will be explained ahead of time by the agency
- The guardian must participate in the clinical intake assessment with the therapist (which lasts 90-120 minutes) before the student can start receiving services
- The services occur during the school day, meaning the student will be removed from class for sessions
- If there are concerns about the services, it is important to notify the agency supervisor or referring staff member

### **What should the school and guardian expect from outpatient SBMH therapy?**

After the clinical intake assessment has occurred, a treatment plan with goals will be created for the student. The student generally meets once per week with the therapist, although some students may meet with the therapist twice per month. The therapist should also be checking in with the guardian monthly to review progress and address any new issues. During sessions, the student will begin to process thoughts, feelings, and events and learn and practice skills that will enable them to meet treatment goals. During periods of remote instruction, the intake assessment and sessions will occur virtually.

### **What services are available for students or guardians who do not speak English?**

A few schools have Spanish speaking clinicians, but the majority do not. In these cases, an itinerant Spanish-speaking clinician would come to school to provide services to the student(s). For cases in which the guardian speaks Spanish, but the student is fluent in English, a CMS interpreter is used for the intake and family sessions.

### **How is insurance involved and are there fees for this service?**

SBMH services are individual outpatient mental health services that occur in an alternate setting (i.e., at school). Different agencies accept different insurances. If the assigned agency cannot accept the student's insurance, the guardian should contact their insurance provider about community-based mental health providers. There often are associated fees with mental health services (i.e., copays), and guardians are responsible for any financial costs associated with services; agencies will inform parents of any possible co-pays prior to services starting. Limited financial assistance for the program may be available for uninsured students.