

Date of Hearing: January 22, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 375 (Nguyen) – As Introduced February 3, 2025

Policy Committee: Business and Professions

Vote: 17 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: Yes

Reimbursable: No

**SUMMARY:**

This bill adds qualified autism service (QAS) paraprofessionals (QASPPs) to the list of health care providers that may provide behavioral health treatment services via telehealth, thus ensuring health plans and insurers cover such services.

**FISCAL EFFECT:**

Costs to the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) will depend on the degree of increase in services, which is unknown but could be significant. For example, DDS estimates a 1% increase in purchase of services due to the addition of QASPPs as health care providers will increase local assistance costs by \$76,000 total fund (TF; \$51,000 General Fund (GF)) in the first year and \$152,000 TF (\$101,000 GF) for the second year and ongoing. A 10% increase would result in a cost of approximately \$760,000 TF (\$512,000 GF) in the first year and \$1.52 million TF (\$1.01 million GF) in the second year and ongoing.

No costs to the Medical Board of California, Osteopathic Medical Board of California, Department of Managed Health Care, or Department of Insurance.

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) **Purpose.** This bill is sponsored by the Autism Business Association. According to the author:

Every child with autism deserves access to the care they need, no matter where they live or their family's financial situation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw firsthand how telehealth broke down barriers and connected families to the behavioral health services their children depend on. But now, those same families are at risk of losing coverage for autism therapy provided by qualified paraprofessionals, just because we haven't made telehealth access permanent.

[This bill] ensures that qualified autism service paraprofessionals [QASPPs] are formally recognized as health care providers, so the telehealth services they provide are covered. Without this change, families, especially those in rural and underserved communities, face losing access to essential therapy, forcing them into long waitlists or leaving them with no care at all. AB 375 keeps doors open for children

with autism, supports working parents, and strengthens California's commitment to accessible, equitable health care.

- 2) ***QASPPs.*** Under existing law, to qualify as a QASPP, a person must have a high school diploma or the equivalent, have completed 30 hours of competency-based training designed by a certified behavior analyst, and have six months experience working with people with developmental disabilities. Alternatively, they may have an associate's degree in one of several disciplines, or a degree or certification related to behavior management, and six months of experience working with persons with developmental disabilities. A QASPP must be supervised by a QAS provider or professional, provide treatment and implement services pursuant to a treatment plan developed and approved by a QAS provider, and be employed by the QAS provider or an entity or group that employs QAS providers responsible for the autism treatment plan.

***Telehealth Autism Services.*** Beginning January 1, 2021, AB 744 (Aguiar-Curry), Chapter 867, Statutes of 2019, required health plans and health insurers to cover services provided by a health care provider via telehealth in the same manner as provided for in-person services. While QAS providers and QAS professionals are deemed health care providers in statute, QASPPs are not. Executive Order N-43-2 required health plans and insurers to cover telehealth services provided by QASPPs during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the author's office reports that after the state of emergency was lifted, one of the largest national health insurance plans stopped covering telehealth services for behavioral health treatment for individuals with ASD. By expanding the definition of health care provider to include QASPPs, this bill requires health plans and insurers to cover telehealth services provided by these providers.

### 3) **Prior Legislation.**

AB 2246 (Ramos), of the 2023-24 Legislative Session, was identical to this bill and was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 744 added QAS provider and QAS professional to the definition of health care provider and required health care contracts to specify that a health plan or insurer is required to cover and reimburse diagnosis, consultation, or treatment delivered through telehealth on the same basis and to the same extent as in-person diagnosis, consultation, or treatment.

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