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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair  
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

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### SB 874 (Weber Pierson) - Medi-Cal: behavioral health treatment workgroup

**Version:** April 23, 2026

**Urgency:** No

**Hearing Date:** May 4, 2026

**Policy Vote:** HEALTH 7 - 0, PUB. S. 6 - 0

**Mandate:** No

**Consultant:** Agnes Lee

**Bill Summary:** SB 874 would require individuals providing Medi-Cal behavioral health treatment (BHT) services, as specified, to undergo a background check; and require the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) to release and maintain clear clinical guidance for the provision of the Medi-Cal BHT benefit.

**Fiscal Impact:** Unknown ongoing General Fund costs, likely hundreds of thousands, for the DHCS to enforce Medi-Cal BHT provider background checks, develop and maintain guidance for Medi-Cal BHT services, and provide a report.

**Background:** According to the California Health Benefits Review Program (CHBRP), BHT aims to modify the behavior of individuals with autism spectrum disorder and improve their cognitive, language and social functioning by assessing environmental stimuli and reinforcing appropriate responses. Some treatment modalities are based primarily on behavioral theory, while others are based primarily on developmental theory or on a hybrid of behavioral and developmental theory.

The Medi-Cal program, administered by DHCS, provides health care services to qualified low-income individuals. According to the Medi-Cal provider manual, Medi-Cal covers all medically necessary BHT services for Medi-Cal members with an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis or for members for whom a physician or psychologist determines BHT services are medically necessary regardless of diagnosis. These services include, but are not limited to, behavioral interventions, cognitive behavioral intervention, comprehensive behavioral treatment, language training, modeling, teaching natural strategies, parent training, peer training, pivotal response training, schedules, scripting, self-management, social skills package, and story-based interventions.

According to California's state Medicaid plan, BHT services may be provided by three different levels of providers, ranging from licensed practitioners and board-certified behavior analysts to paraprofessionals with high school diplomas and competency training or certification. While only licensed or board-certified professionals can perform certain services, paraprofessionals provide many of the services under the supervision of the other professionals.

**Proposed Law:** Specific provisions of the bill would:

- Require DHCS to ensure that any individual providing BHT services paid for by the Medi-Cal program who does not hold a current and valid license issued by a California state licensing board requiring a fingerprint-based background check must undergo a background check, as specified.

- Require DHCS to convene a stakeholder workgroup, as specified, to review the implementation of BHT services in Medi-Cal, including applied behavior analysis and other evidence-based interventions.
- Require DHCS to release and maintain clear clinical guidance for the provision of the Medi-Cal BHT benefit, as specified.
- Require DHCS to report to the Legislature and publish on its internet website, an analysis of the utilization of BHT services in California since 2014, a synopsis of changes made as a result of the stakeholder workgroup, and recommendations for statutory, regulatory, or administrative actions necessary to ensure Medi-Cal reimbursement practices align with federal Medicaid program integrity requirements.

**Related Legislation:**

AB 277 (Alanis) would require certain persons who provide BHT services to undergo a background check. The bill is currently in the Senate.

AB 2233 (Ta) would prohibit health plans from imposing certain restrictions on BHT services. The bill is currently in the Senate.

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