

Memo

Date: October 13, 2025

To: Providers of Alameda County Behavioral Health Department (ACBHD) Specialty Mental Health Services (SMHS)

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Subject: Guidance on Use of *Psychotherapy w/Patient w/E/M*

The purpose of this memo is to provide guidance to SMHS providers on the correct use of the *Psychotherapy with Evaluation and Management (E/M)* Codes (CPT codes 90833, 90836, 90838).

Code Details

An allowable E/M code together with *Psychotherapy with E/M* (CPT codes 90833, 90836, and 90838) should be used when psychotherapy and E/M services are provided on the same day, even when occurring over multiple encounters on the same day. The E/M code captures the medication-related component and *Psychotherapy with patient w/E/M* captures the psychotherapy component.

Per the American Medical Association (AMA) and Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) rules, *Psychotherapy with E/M* is dependent on specific E/M codes (e.g., 99202-99205) and functions like an add-on code, not a primary code. As such, it is only available on the [DHCS Service Table](#) as an add-on code. Please see the DHCS SMHS Service Table for specific information about which E/M codes *Psychotherapy w/Patient w/E/M* are dependent on.

An example to illustrate use of these codes:

A psychiatrist meets with an established patient in their office for 60 minutes. During the session, the psychiatrist performs about 15 minutes of medication evaluation and 45 minutes of psychotherapy.

Even though two services were provided together, the psychiatrist is required to report them using separate codes, with each code capturing the distinct activities of each service. In this example, the psychiatrist reports one unit of 99212 and one unit of 90836.

To enter this service in SmartCare or Clinician's Gateway (CG), select 99212 - 99215 *E/M Est Office/OP (w/99415 Add-on)* as the primary code with 15 minutes duration.¹ In the add-on code

¹ In SmartCare the primary code time field is named *Total Duration*, in CG it is *Duration*.

dropdown, select 90833;90836;90838 *Psychotherapy w/Patient w/E/M (w/T2021 Sub-Code)* with 45 minutes duration.²

Instructions for Correcting *Psychotherapy w/Patient w/E/M* Claiming Errors

To correct incorrect usage of this code, please review the following:

- For services still in *Show Status*: Please make corrections to the service (i.e. correct the procedure code, duration, etc.) or error the service if it was a completely invalid service entry.
- For services in *Complete Status*: ACBHD is finalizing an eForm to request deletion of services that are in "Complete Status." Until the eForm is available, please contact the AC Health ONE Service Desk at ACHSupport@acgov.org or (510) 817-0076 and those requests will be routed to the ACBHD Billing & Benefits Support Team.

Billing System and Electronic Health Record (EHR) Modifications

SmartCare and CG have been updated to remove *Psychotherapy w/Patient w/E/M* as a primary code. The code is now only available as an add-on code for specific E/M codes.

Please contact the SmartCare or CG team if any of the following situations occur:

- *Psychotherapy w/Patient w/E/M* is present in the primary procedure code dropdown in SmartCare or CG.
- *Psychotherapy w/Patient w/E/M* is not present in the Add-On dropdown in SmartCare or CG.
- 90833, 90836, 90838 display as separate codes in any dropdown in either SmartCare or CG.

Additional Resources

- [American Medical Association \(AMA\) CPT Codebook](#), *Evaluation and Management* and *Psychotherapy* sections.
- [Billing and Coding: Psychiatric Diagnostic Evaluation and Psychotherapy Services A57520](#)
- [ACBHD HCPC/CPT Codes FAQ](#)

Support and Next Steps

For general questions about HCPC/CPT code usage, please contact QA at QATA@acgov.org. For billing or claiming issues, please contact the AC Health ONE Service Desk at ACHSupport@acgov.org.

² In SmartCare the add-on code time field is named *Duration*, in CG it is *Add-On Time*.