



Clinical Services TIPS

Treatment Interventions, Protocols, and Suggestions

Purpose: TIPS provide guidance for CBO and County Specialty Mental Health Services (SMHS) and Drug Medi-Cal Organized Delivery System (DMC-ODS) providers to enhance service quality and ensure compliance with Alameda County agreements and California regulations.

Travel Time

1. Funding

- Travel and Transportation time are not claimable to the State.
- During FY 2024-25, Alameda County will continue to reimburse providers for travel time, consistent with provider contracts.
- The information on this TIPS sheet describes how travel time can be billed to the County.

2. Travel, not Transportation

- Travel time is the time spent traveling to meet a client in a community location, school, or home to provide services and is billable to the County using the travel field in the SmartCare billing system.
- Transporting a client or their family member for their convenience is Transportation time and is not a billable activity to the State or County.
- Non-emergency transportation is a potential benefit for eligible individuals who cannot access public transportation.¹

3. Documenting Travel Time

- Accurate documentation of travel time is essential for compliance with audits and billing reviews.
- Accurate travel time, location, and relevant context should be documented in the note.

¹ https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/medi-cal/Pages/Transportation_General_FAQ.aspx

- If unusually heavy traffic significantly extends travel time, providers should briefly document the circumstances in the progress note. Example: “The travel time from the client’s home to the office was longer than usual due to heavy traffic.”

4. Origination Points

Travel time is not claimable if it is personal or administrative.

a) Commute Time

Travel time begins at an agency office or service location. If starting from home, staff should subtract the regular commute time from the travel time.

b) Travel Between Agency Sites

Travel time between two sites belonging to the same agency is not billable.

5. Avoid Double-billing Travel Time

Travel time should be allocated to the appropriate client and service.

a) Multiple Clients at One Location

When multiple clients are seen at one location, travel time can be billed only once or split between the multiple clients and clearly documented.

- Example: “This writer traveled to the client’s home for an individual therapy session with the client and her sibling, opened under separate charts. Travel time was split between the client and her sibling.”
- Example: “This writer traveled to the client’s home for an individual therapy session with the client and her sibling, opened under separate charts. The entire travel time is billed under this client.”

b) Multiple Clients at Multiple Locations

When traveling to multiple clients throughout the day, travel time should be billed for each client separately. Travel time for the last client who is seen should include the time to the client’s location plus the time back to the office.

c) Multiple Services for One Client

When completing multiple services (e.g., individual therapy and collateral session) for one client during a single visit, travel time should be billed only once.

- Example: One progress note reflects, “This writer traveled to the client’s home for an individual therapy session.” Another note for the same date states, “Travel time was billed in another note.”

6. Non-Billable Travel

- Travel time is not billable if no service is provided.
- If a visit is canceled while in route and no service is provided, travel time is not billable. Staff should document the cancellation and the attempt to provide services. For example, if a clinician drives to a client’s home and no one is there, the travel time is unbillable. Document the no-show but do not bill for travel.
- Exception: If while at the client’s home, a medically necessary service occurs with a family member about the client’s functioning and treatment, travel time can be billed as part of an appropriate clinical service.

7. Supervisory Review

For travel situations that do not align clearly with these guidelines, consult with a supervisor to determine whether the time is billable.

Resources

- [DHCS Billing Manuals](#)
- [DHCS Information Notice 23-068](#)
- [CalMHSA CalAIM Documentation Guides](#)
- [ACBHD FAQs](#) - Section 19 of the QA Manual webpage
- [ACBHD Supplemental Documentation Guide- 7-2](#) on the QA Manual webpage

Disclaimer: *This document complements, but does not replace, CBO-specific policies. Staff must comply with evolving standards, laws, and organizational requirements. Guidance may change to reflect regulatory or contractual updates.*