

## **Adverse Childhood Experiences**

ACEs, or Adverse Childhood Experiences, are potentially traumatic incidents which occur in a child's life. These experiences occur before a child is 18, but they remember them throughout their life. ACEs refer to specific types of trauma children may experience. They include physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, neglect, losing a parent such as through divorce, being exposed to domestic violence, having a parent with a mental illness, having a member of the household who abuses drugs or alcohol, or having a parent who has been in jail. Children living through these experiences may suffer from adverse effects for the rest of their lives.

Children who experience these traumatic events or environments can experience challenges in their lives. Without a healthy adult to support them, they may experience toxic stress. They may encounter chronic health conditions like depression, asthma, or diabetes. If a child experiences toxic stress long-term, they may adopt unhealthy coping mechanisms such as substance abuse. When a child experiences chronic stress, it can lead to a lower tolerance for stressful situations in adulthood. Children can also experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health issues. Assessments can be performed to determine the number of traumatic events an individual has experienced which are used to determine their ACE score. Studies have found that the risk of chronic illnesses, such as heart disease, lung disease, and cancer, is greater for people with high ACE scores. A high ACE score can also be linked to early death.

### **Reimbursement for ACEs**

Effective March 1, 2023, Wyoming Medicaid providers who have completed the certification process detailed below will be eligible for a \$29 payment for conducting ACE screenings for children with full Medicaid. Qualifying ACE screenings are eligible for payment in any clinical setting in which billing occurs through Medicaid fee-for-service.

- **Fee-for-Service**

Payments will follow the process as outlined below and will be paid directly to the provider submitting the claim.

- Payment for ACE screenings for Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), Rural Health Clinics (RHCs), and Indian Health Services (IHS) is included in the encounter rate when children are seen for regular services and are not separately reimbursable.

### ***Guidance on Billing for ACE Screening via Telehealth***

Providers may screen a patient for ACEs via telehealth if the provider believes that the ACE screening can be administered in a clinically appropriate manner. Providers must continue to comply with all other billing procedures, Wyoming Medicaid guidelines, and confidentiality laws.

### ***Documentation***

Under the existing ACE screening policy, providers must document all of the following: the assessment tool that was used, documentation that the completed screening was reviewed, the results of the screening, the interpretation of results, what was discussed with the member and/or family, and any appropriate actions taken. This documentation must remain in the beneficiary's medical record and be available upon request.

## **Certification**

[Eligible Wyoming Medicaid providers](#) must complete [a certified ACEs Aware Core Training](#) in order to receive reimbursement for services provided and may be required to provide proof of attestation at the request of Wyoming Medicaid.

Steps to complete certification are the following:

1. Register for training at <https://training.acesaware.org/>
2. Complete 2-hour virtual training and course evaluation.
3. Obtain a copy of Certification via the [ACEs Aware website](#).

**Note:** At this time, there is no requirement for recertification. The certification is a free two hour training and provides continuing education credits.

## **Wyoming Medicaid Billing Codes**

The following Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System (HCPCS) should be used to bill Wyoming Medicaid based on ACE screening results:

### ***HCPCS: G9919***

- Screening performed – result indicates patient is at **high risk for toxic stress**; education and interventions (as necessary) provided.
- Providers must bill this HCPCS code when the patient's **ACE score is 4 or greater (high risk)**
- Payment: \$29

### ***HCPCS: G9920***

- Screening performed – result indicates patient is at **lower risk for toxic stress**; education and interventions (as necessary) provided.
- Providers must bill this HCPCS code when the patient's **ACE score is between 0 – 3 (lower risk)**
- Payment: \$29

## **Screening Frequency**

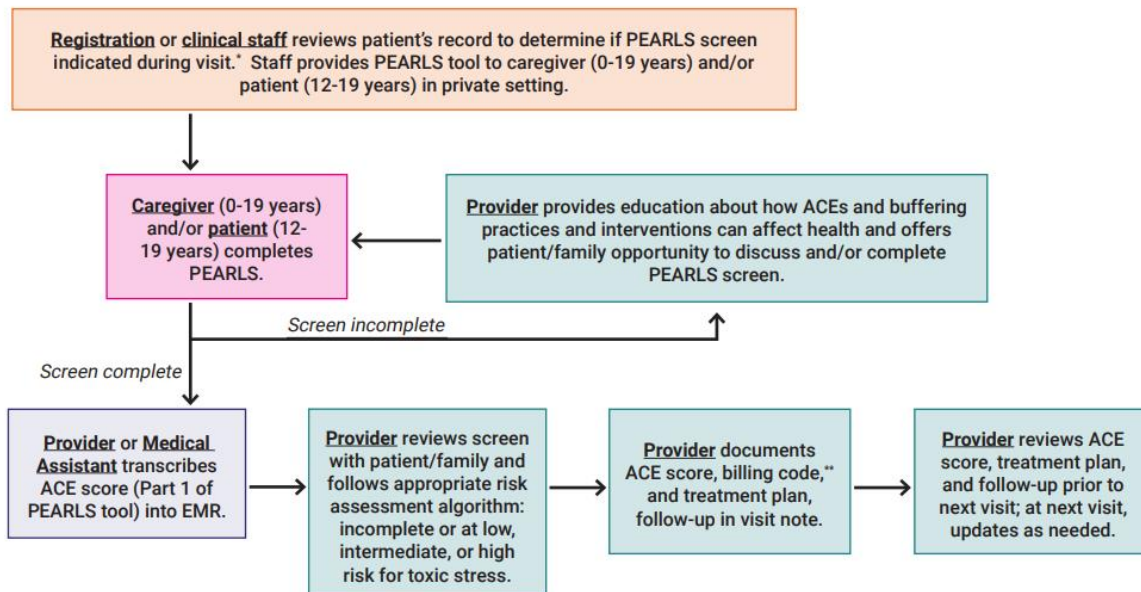
Wyoming Medicaid payment is available for ACE screenings based on the following schedule:

- **Children and adolescents under age 21:** Permitted for periodic ACE rescreening as determined appropriate and medically necessary, not more than once per year, per client. Children should be screened periodically to monitor the possible accumulation of ACEs and increased risk for a toxic stress physiology.

The Pediatric ACEs and Related Life-events Screener (PEARLS) is used to screen children and adolescents ages 0-19 for ACEs. The PEARLS tool includes a screening for ACEs (Part 1) as well as a screen for additional adversities (Part 2). There are three versions of the tool available, based on age and reporter:

- PEARLS child tool, for ages 0-11, to be completed by a parent/caregiver.
- PEARLS adolescent tool, for ages 12-19, to be completed by a parent/caregiver.
- PEARLS for adolescent self-report tool, for ages 12-19, to be completed by the adolescent.

## Pediatric ACE Screening Clinical Workflow



\*PEARLS is recommended to be completed once per year.

\*\*Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System (HCPCS) billing codes for ACE scores:

**G9919:** ACE score  $\geq 4$ , high risk for toxic stress

**G9920:** ACE score of 0 – 3, lower risk for toxic stress. For purposes of coding, scores of 1-3 with ACE-Associated Health Conditions should be coded as G9920, even though patient falls into the high-risk category of the clinical algorithm.

\*\*\*PEARLS to be completed once per year, and no less often than every 3 years

Paper copies of the PEARLS is available at: <https://www.acesaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Provider-Toolkit-Screening-Tools-Overview.pdf>.

### Deployment Information

**Deployment Date:** March 8, 2023

**Audiences:** All Providers