

LEGISLATIVE ADVISORY

SB 402 (Valladares) Chapter 413, Statutes of 2025 – Health care coverage: autism

Autism Treatment Coverage

Business & Professions Code 2290.5

Operative Date of Legislation: January 1, 2026

Attention Board of Psychology (Board) stakeholders:

Senate Bill (SB) 402 (Valladares) was signed by Governor Newsom on October 6, 2025, and becomes operative on January 1, 2026. This bill relocates the statutory definitions related to autism treatment providers—"qualified autism service provider," "qualified autism service professional," and "qualified autism service paraprofessional"—from the Health and Safety Code and Insurance Code into the Business and Professions Code (BPC).

Summary of Changes

SB 402 reorganizes existing definitions related to autism treatment providers without changing coverage requirements and ensures statutory consistency across related bills. These definitions are tied to existing laws requiring health care service plans and health insurers to cover behavioral health treatment for pervasive developmental disorder and autism.

Implementation

Effective January 1, 2026, licensees regulated by the Board who provide behavioral health treatment to individuals with autism should be aware that the statutory definitions used to determine treatment authorization, provider qualifications, and insurance recognition have been relocated to the Business and Professions Code—the same Code that governs psychologist licensure. This change does not modify the scope of practice for psychologists or psychological associates, nor does it create new training, supervision, or licensure obligations. However, it does affect how licensees interact with autism-related behavioral health treatment systems and how insurers and health plans interpret provider qualifications.

Because these definitions are now codified in the Code, licensed psychologists should review and update any internal documentation that references qualification standards for autism services. This may include treatment plans, informed consent materials, billing templates, supervisory records, and any policy or clinical documents that cite statutory definitions. Ensuring that these materials reference the correct Code section will help avoid administrative delays, billing issues, or discrepancies in treatment authorization. For practice-related questions about how to update such documentation, licensed psychologists should consult their own qualified legal counsel, and their professional association if they are members.

This change also impacts licensed psychologists who supervise qualified autism service professionals or paraprofessionals. Supervisors should confirm that their internal compliance materials, supervision documents, and organizational policies reflect the updated statutory citations and terminology as now located in the Business and Professions Code. While SB 402 does not impose new supervisory duties, insurers and health plans will be evaluating provider qualifications based on the relocated definitions, making accurate citations increasingly

important. For practice-related questions about how to update their internal materials for compliance, licensed psychologists should consult their own qualified legal counsel, and their professional association if they are members.