



World Trade Center (WTC) Health Program
Medical Coverage Determination
Acupuncture Services
Publish Date: December 30, 2022

I. Coverage Overview

This Medical Coverage Determination (MCD) outlines the coverage of medically necessary¹ acupuncture services for the Clinical Centers of Excellence (CCEs) and Nationwide Provider Network (NPN) members.

Acupuncture involves the manipulation of a bodily system by inserting small needles into identified anatomical points.² Acupuncture methods may also include the use of heat, pressure, friction, suction, and electromagnetic impulses.³ The WTC Health Program provides coverage of such acupuncture services in certain instances.

The WTC Health Program will cover medically necessary acupuncture services for members with certified WTC-related cancer when authorized by a WTC Health Program provider. The WTC Health Program follows the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) guidelines which recommend the use of acupuncture for cancer-related pain, fatigue, nausea, and/or vomiting.⁴ The WTC Health Program will also cover acupuncture services for members with chronic pain resulting from certified WTC-related acute traumatic injuries (ATI), musculoskeletal disorders (MSD), and health conditions causing chronic pain that are medically associated with the ATI or MSD condition. The WTC Health Program must authorize acupuncture services for ATI and MSD conditions.

Members may receive up to 12 acupuncture visits in 90 days if they meet certain criteria for authorization. Members showing improvement may receive subsequent authorization for an additional eight acupuncture visits for a total of 20 acupuncture visits during the 12-month period from the date of their first treatment.

¹ The WTC Health Program defines medically necessary treatment as the provision of healthcare services to manage, ameliorate, or cure a WTC-related health condition or health condition medically associated with a WTC-related health condition. See 42 C.F.R. § 88.1 at <https://www.cdc.gov/wtc/regulations2.html>.

² See HHS chronic pain management at <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pain-mgmt-best-practices-draft-final-report-05062019.pdf>.

³ See Acupuncture, Johns Hopkins Medicine at <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/acupuncture>; see also Acupuncture: In Depth, National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), at <https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/acupuncture-in-depth>.

⁴ See NCCN guidelines for survivorship at https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/survivorship.pdf; pain at https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/pain.pdf; fatigue at https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/fatigue.pdf; and antiemesis at https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/antiemesis.pdf.

II. Covered Acupuncture Services

Acupuncture services available for coverage under the WTC Health Program include traditional acupuncture with needles, as well as acupuncture services involving heat, pressure, friction, suction, and electromagnetic impulses. Coverage of acupuncture services is permitted only when in accordance with other Program guidelines.⁵ There must be a clinical evidence base to support the use of acupuncture services.

A Prior Authorization Level 2 (PA2) is required for all acupuncture services rendered for members with certified WTC-related or medically associated cancer. The CCE/NPN Clinical Director may provide a PA2 for cancer-related acupuncture services only when the services are supported by the current clinical evidence base⁶ and the member meets all of the applicable requirements described in this MCD.

Acupuncture services for *non-cancer* certified WTC-related or associated conditions causing chronic pain are limited to ATI or MSD conditions. A Prior Authorization Level 3 (PA3) is required for all acupuncture services when this treatment modality is used for members with chronic pain⁷ resulting from a certified WTC-related ATI or MSD condition or health conditions medically associated with certified WTC-related ATIs or MSDs.

The WTC Health Program may cover acupuncture services beyond those specifically referenced in this MCD only on a limited case-by-case basis and where supported by the clinical evidence base. Refer to the WTC Health Program Codebook for a full list of covered medical services, procedures, and diagnosis codes.⁸

III. Coverage Guidelines – General Eligibility Requirements for Medically Necessary Acupuncture Services for CCE and NPN Members

All acupuncture services must meet the criteria below.

A. Authorization Period

The PA2 and PA3 for acupuncture services will cover up to 12 visits in 90 days. Eight additional visits will be covered for those demonstrating improvement on a subsequent PA, for a total of 20 visits per 12-month authorization period, starting from the date of the first acupuncture treatment.

⁵ See *generally* WTC Health Program Administrative Manual for a full description of Program guidelines, policies, and procedures, at <https://www.cdc.gov/wtc/ppm.html>.

⁶ Medical devices, procedures, or treatments must have a clinical evidence base from a substantial body of published, peer-reviewed, English-language clinical studies or published, peer-reviewed, English-language clinical recommendations and guidelines.

⁷ Chronic pain due to a WTC-related or associated medical condition is defined as pain lasting more than 3 months, per the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH). See <https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/chronic-pain-in-depth>.

⁸ The WTC Health Program reviewed federal coverage policies from the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), TRICARE, Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Labor's Office of Workers' Compensation Programs, as well as private coverage policies from Aetna, BlueCross BlueShield, and Cigna in developing the coverage criteria for acupuncture services outlined in this MCD.

B. PA Level

1. Level 2 – Authorization by CCE/NPN Clinical Director

A PA2 is required for all acupuncture services rendered for certified WTC-related or medically associated cancer. The CCE/NPN Clinical Director will determine whether the acupuncture services are medically necessary to manage, ameliorate, or cure the member's certified WTC-related cancer, or cancer medically associated with a certified WTC-related health condition. The CCE/NPN Clinical Director will also ensure that the member meets the PA2 criteria listed below in Section III.B.3. and confirm that the criteria are appropriately documented in the member's medical record.

For detailed Prior Authorization procedures, see instructions found in the WTC Health Program's Administrative Manual.⁹

2. Level 3 – Authorization by the WTC Health Program

A PA3 is required for all acupuncture services rendered to members with chronic pain resulting from a certified WTC-related ATI or MSD condition, or a condition medically associated with a certified WTC-related ATI or MSD condition.

The WTC Health Program will review the medical justification provided by the CCE/NPN Clinical Director and determine whether the acupuncture services are medically necessary to treat the member's certified WTC-related ATI or MSD condition. The WTC Health Program will also ensure that the member meets the PA3 criteria listed below in Section III.B.4. and confirm that the criteria are appropriately documented in the member's medical record.

For detailed Prior Authorization procedures, see instructions found in the WTC Health Program's Administrative Manual.¹⁰

3. Initial PA2 Authorization Criteria for Acupuncture Services for Cancer

The CCE/NPN Clinical Director may authorize acupuncture services if **ALL** the criteria below (a. through c.) are met and clearly documented in the member's medical record:

- a. The member has a certified WTC-related cancer, or a cancer medically associated with a certified WTC-related health condition, and is receiving treatment for that condition from a WTC Health Program-affiliated provider;
- b. The acupuncture services are provided while the member is under the care of a WTC Health Program-affiliated provider; **AND**

⁹ WTC Health Program Administrative Manual, [Chapter 4, Section 3.4] at https://www.cdc.gov/wtc/ppm.html#medical_prior.

¹⁰ WTC Health Program Administrative Manual, [Chapter 4, Section 3.4] at https://www.cdc.gov/wtc/ppm.html#medical_prior.

- c. Acupuncture is determined to be medically necessary¹¹ and **all of the following criteria** are established:

(1) The acupuncture services must be performed in conjunction with a treatment regimen specifying the frequency and duration of treatments and an evidence base for the indication is noted in the NCCN guidelines¹² for the certified WTC-related cancer or cancer that is medically associated with a certified WTC-related health condition;¹³

AND

(2) A billable medical code is available for the acupuncture service.

4. Initial PA3 Authorization Criteria for Acupuncture Services for ATI and MSD Conditions

The WTC Health Program may authorize acupuncture services if **ALL** the criteria below (a. through c.) are met and clearly documented in the member's medical record:

- a. The member has chronic pain¹⁴ that is a result of a certified WTC-related ATI or MSD condition, or chronic pain that is a result of a condition medically associated with a certified WTC-related ATI or MSD condition, and is receiving treatment for that condition from a WTC Health Program-affiliated provider;
- b. The acupuncture services are provided while the member is under the care of a WTC Health Program-affiliated provider; **AND**
- c. Acupuncture is determined to be medically necessary¹⁵ and **all of the following criteria** are established:

(1) A referral from the treating provider is provided;

(2) Medical records showing that there is a medical indication for treatment, and the modality selected is effective per the evidence base, are required before pursuing acupuncture for the treatment of a member's chronic pain;

(3) A treatment plan, specifying the frequency and duration of treatments is provided;

AND

¹¹ Medical necessity is determined by the treating clinician, but medical records must show that there is a medical indication for treatment and the modality selected is effective per the evidence base.

¹² See NCCN Guidelines, at https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/default.aspx.

¹³ For patients with cancer, some indications for acupuncture include treatment of cancer-related pain, fatigue, nausea, and vomiting. See NCCN Guidelines, at https://www.nccn.org/professionals/physician_gls/pdf/survivorship.pdf

¹⁴ Chronic pain lasting at least 3 months, per the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH). See <https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/chronic-pain-in-depth>

¹⁵ See Footnote 7

(4) A billable medical code is available for the acupuncture service.

5. Subsequent Authorizations

The initial PA2 and PA3 for acupuncture services will only cover 12 visits in 90 days. An additional 8 visits will be covered for those demonstrating improvement on a subsequent PA for a total of 20 visits per the 12-month authorization period. The authorization period starts on the first date of acupuncture treatment and ends when the 90-day authorization period is over, unless a new PA for acupuncture services is prepared. However, even if a new PA2 or PA3 is prepared, the Program will not cover more than 20 acupuncture visits for the condition per the 12 calendar-month period. Treatment must be completed at the end of this 12-month period starting from the date of initial acupuncture treatment.

The WTC Health Program-affiliated provider must furnish a plan of care to the CCE/NPN Clinical Director prior to the end of the current authorization period, and before the start of each new authorization period. The CCE/NPN Clinical Director or WTC Health Program, as appropriate, must sign and authorize a new PA reconfirming that the member's acupuncture services are medically necessary and all criteria in the MCD are met.

With each subsequent PA for acupuncture services, a plan of care, including frequency and duration of services, and documentation of the treatment response and effectiveness must be provided. The necessity of acupuncture services will be revisited by the WTC Health Program if the member's WTC-related or WTC-associated medical condition is exacerbated or does not show improvement or stability with acupuncture services.

IV. Prior Authorization Request Submission Requirements

The PA2 for acupuncture services must be signed and authorized by the CCE/NPN Clinical Director and maintained in the member's medical record. The CCE/NPN Clinical Director will maintain documentation that demonstrates MCD criteria has been met in the member's medical record, as well as documentation related to the PA2.

The PA3 Request for acupuncture services must be signed by the requesting CCE/NPN Clinical Director and submitted to the Third-Party Administrator (TPA) contractor through the Secure File Transfer Protocol (SFTP) server. The WTC Health Program will decide whether to authorize the service and will inform the TPA contractor, who will subsequently inform the CCE/NPN of the decision. The CCE/NPN will maintain documentation that demonstrates MCD criteria has been met in the member's medical record, as well as documentation related to the PA3 Request. Incomplete or inaccurate requests will be returned to the requesting CCE/NPN for additional information.

All documentation for completed acupuncture service authorizations are subject to audit by the WTC Health Program.

V. Billing/Coding Guidelines

All approved codes are listed in the WTC Health Program Codebook, located on the Centralized Accessible Real-time Enterprise (CARE) portal.

For consideration of codes that are not currently included in the WTC Health Program Codebook, please submit a WTC-5 Medical Code Request form to the TPA contractor via the standard WTCMedCode@csra.com mailbox process.