

How is the CANS Used?

At Seneca, we use the CANS in many ways to transform the lives of children, youth and their families and to improve our programs. Hopefully, this guide will help you to also use the CANS as a multi-purpose tool. What is the CANS?

It is an Assessment Strategy

When you first meet your clients and their caregivers, you can use this guide to make sure you gather all the information you need. Most items include “*questions to consider*” which you may find useful in when asking about needs and strengths. These are not questions that you must ask, but are available to you as suggestions. Many clinicians have found this useful to use during initial sessions either in person or over the phone if there are follow up sessions required to get a full picture of needs before beginning therapy and treatment planning.

It Guides Care and Treatment Planning

When we mark an item on the CANS as a ‘2’ or ‘3’ (‘action needed’ or ‘immediate action needed’) we are indicating not only that it is a serious need for our client, but one that we are going to attempt to work on during the course of our treatment. As such, when you write your treatment plan, you should do your best to address any Needs, Impacts on Functioning, or Risk factors that you rate as a 2 or higher in that document.

It Helps to Establish Medical Necessity

For many insurance plans, including services billed to Medicare/Medi-Cal, it is important that we establish that the work we do is medically necessary. We may know that it is, but it also needs to be reflected in documentation tools like the CANS. Individuals who have been referred to us for service generally have at least one score of ‘2’ or ‘3’ in both their Needs and Impact and Functioning areas. Although you do not need to score the CANS in any particular way, a low enough score would indicate that our client might not really need our services. The scores we give on the CANS can guide us in choosing the best diagnosis, the best level of care or intensity of supports, and the most critical areas where individuals may need our support and crisis interventions.

It Facilitates Outcomes Measurement

Many users of the CANS and organizations complete the CANS every six months to measure change and transformation. We work with children, youth and families and their needs tend to change over time. Needs may change in response to many factors including quality clinical support provided. One way we determine how our supports are helping to alleviate suffering and restore functioning is by re-assessing needs and tracking change.

It is a Communication Tool

When a client leaves one of our programs, we do a discharge summary integrated with CANS scoring to define progress, measure ongoing needs and help us make continuity of care decisions. This gives us a picture of how much progress has been made, and allows us to make recommendations for future care which tie to current needs. And finally, it gives us a shared language to talk about our clients and creates opportunities for collaboration. It is our hope that this guide will help you to make the most out of the CANS and guide you in filling it out in an accurate way that helps you make good clinical decisions