



## First-timers' Guide to Washington Apple Health

### Part 2: Making your first health care appointment

*If there are any words or terms you don't know in this guide, check the health care terms on page 5.*

#### Step 1: Get a primary care provider

Once you are enrolled in a health plan, you will need to choose a primary care provider, sometimes called a PCP. Your primary care provider might be a doctor, a nurse practitioner, a physician assistant, or a naturopath. Sometimes it's not just one person—it can be a clinic with several kinds of providers.

##### Why a primary care provider is important

Your primary care provider is the main health care professional you see, whether you are sick or getting preventive care. If you need special care that your primary care provider can't give, they will refer you to a specialist.

Even if you aren't sick now, it's important to choose a primary care provider and to schedule your first appointment. Your primary care provider will help you prevent future health problems and do routine screenings for certain diseases.

##### How to choose your primary care provider

If you don't choose a primary care provider, your health plan will choose one for you.

You can ask for a male or female primary care provider. You can also ask for a provider who speaks your language, specializes in your disability, or understands your culture.

You can ask for a specific provider, as long as they are in your health plan's network.

If the provider you want is not in your health plan's network, ask the provider which health plan they work with. If the other health plan is available where you live, you can change to that health plan. (See Part 1 of the First-timers' Guide to Washington Apple Health (Medicaid) to see how to change your health plan.)

Your primary care provider should be someone you feel comfortable with. If you aren't happy with them for any reason, you can choose another provider.

To choose a different primary care provider, follow the directions sent to you by your health plan, call your health plan's customer service phone number, or visit your health plan's website.

See a list of the Apple Health (Medicaid) health plans, with phone numbers and links to their websites in Part 1 of this guide.

#### Step 2: Make an appointment

You must have an appointment to see a provider. Once you have selected a primary care provider, call their office to make an appointment.

Check the information your health plan sent you to see how to make your first appointment. You should be able to find the provider's office contact information through your health plan's website. Or call your health plan's customer service line and ask for the phone number to make an appointment.

If you have immediate health concerns or needs, you should be able to see your primary care provider within a few days.

Even if you don't have immediate health concerns, make an appointment for a general check-up (also called a wellness check). It takes longer to get an appointment for a general check-up, so don't put it off.

### **If you need an interpreter**

If you don't speak English, professional interpreters are available in many languages, including sign language, at no cost to you. When you make an appointment, let the receptionist know if you need an interpreter. The interpreter can go to the provider's office or be on the phone during your appointment.

It's better to use a professional interpreter than to bring a family member or friend to interpret for you. Professional interpreters are trained to understand health care terms and will help you and your provider understand each other.

### **If you have disabilities**

If you have a speech or hearing disability, difficulty communicating, or a mobility impairment, be sure to tell the receptionist about it when you make the appointment. The receptionist will help you make any necessary arrangements.

### **Getting help with transportation**

If you have no way to get to your health care appointment, you may be eligible for help with transportation. The appointment must be for services allowed by your current health plan. A regional broker contracted by the Health Care Authority will arrange the most appropriate transportation for you.

For information on how to request non-emergency medical transportation, see this Health Care Authority webpage <http://www.hca.wa.gov/free-or-low-cost-health-care/apple-health-medicaid-coverage/transportation-services-non-emergency>.

### **Changing appointments**

If you need to change or cancel an appointment, please call the primary care provider as soon as possible.

If you don't go to your appointment and don't call, valuable appointment time is wasted that could be used by another patient.

## **Step 3: Get ready for your appointment**

Make a list of the things you want to talk about with your primary care provider. Your provider can go over the most important things at your first visit. There's a checklist you can use at the end of this guide.

Take a list of all your prescription medications with you, including vitamins, herbal supplements, and other over-the-counter medications, even aspirin.

Write down any allergies you have to medications, foods, or environmental allergens, such as pollen.

Bring previous medical records, including vaccination or immunization records, if you have them.

## **Step 4: Go to your appointment**

### **Take someone with you**

Feel free to take along a family member or friend. That person can help you find your way around or just help you feel more comfortable. Sometimes it's good to have someone else to listen to what your primary care provider tells you.

### **Children's appointments**

Parents are allowed to stay with their children during the exam. Pre-teen and teenage kids may see their primary care provider without a parent present. Discuss this with your kids and their primary care provider.

For details about benefits and services for children covered by Apple Health, please see the *Welcome to Washington Apple Health* booklet.

<http://www.hca.wa.gov/assets/free-or-low-cost/22-1298.pdf>

### **Get there early**

Plan to arrive at the provider's office 15 minutes before your appointment. Check in with the receptionist and fill out any forms given to you. You will need to show your Services Card (also called a ProviderOne card) and your health plan ID card. You will be asked to show a photo ID, such as a driver's license.

### **Meet your primary care provider**

Your primary care provider will check out your overall health and talk to you about any health-related problems.

Ask your provider for written instructions on any health topics discussed during your visit. It's OK to ask your provider to repeat anything you don't understand.

### **Ask about your medications**

Ask if your current medications are covered by your health plan. If they aren't, your provider may be able to select a medication that is covered.

Tell your primary care provider about any problems you may have with your medications.

If you have any questions about your medications, ask them before you leave the office.

### **Getting lab tests**

Your primary care provider might order tests. It usually takes a few days to get the results. Ask how long it will take and make sure your provider knows how to contact you.

To get tests done, you might need to go to a different room or a different building. Your primary care provider or an assistant should tell you what you need to know. If you're not sure, ask for directions.

### **Getting special forms signed**

If you need your primary care provider to fill out and sign special forms for you, please allow extra time for that. It is helpful to fill out the form with information that you know about, such as name and address, before you give it to the provider. This helps the provider fill out the form more quickly.

Ask the receptionist or the assistant about the best way to get your forms filled out and how long it will take.

## **Step 5: Other useful information**

### **Getting prescriptions filled**

You don't have to pay for prescriptions that are covered by your health plan.

If you don't know how to fill prescriptions, such as which pharmacies to use, contact your health plan for more information.

### **Taking medications**

Be sure to follow your primary care provider's instructions when taking medications. It's important to take the right amount, at the right time, and in the right way. Medications don't work as well—and may be harmful to you—if you don't take them correctly.

If you don't understand the instructions, ask your primary care provider to explain them to you.

Be sure to go over your prescriptions with the pharmacist when you pick up your medications.

### **Seeing a specialist**

Do not make an appointment with a specialist until you talk to your primary care provider or your health plan.

To see a specialist you need to get "prior approval," also called a "referral," from your primary care provider.

It's important to follow your health plan's procedure. If you see a specialist on your own, without prior approval, you will have to pay for the appointment out of your own pocket.

### **Women's health and pregnancies**

You don't need to get prior approval from your primary care provider to see an obstetrician or gynecologist (OB/GYN), as long as they are in your health plan's network.

Routine women's health check-ups are covered, as well as any follow-up care that might be needed. For pregnant women, regular care during pregnancy is covered.

### **Getting mental health treatment**

Treatment for mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder is covered by your health plan.

Your primary care provider will help coordinate any mental health care you need with a mental health provider. The mental health network provider will decide where you should receive ongoing services. For an outpatient visit to a mental health provider, call your health plan. You may need to be treated at a community mental health agency if you have a serious mental health condition.

### **Getting chemical dependency (substance use disorder) treatment**

You do not need prior approval or a referral from your health plan. If you are enrolled in Apple Health, contact a treatment agency directly. Visit the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) website to find a treatment agency near you to get an assessment for treatment approval.

[www.dshs.wa.gov/dbhr/dadirectory.shtml](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/dbhr/dadirectory.shtml)

### **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) to be connected to a skilled, trained counselor at a crisis center in your area, any time, day or night.

**If you need care after hours**

Call your primary care provider to see if they offer after-hours care.

You can also call your health plan's 24-hour nurse helpline and ask a nurse what to do. The phone number is listed in Part 1 of this guide.

**If you need urgent care**

You may have an injury or illness that is not an emergency but needs urgent care. Contact your plan to find urgent care facilities in your plan's network. You can also call your plan's 24-hour nurse helpline for advice.

**In an emergency**

If you have a sudden or severe health problem that you think is an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

As soon as possible afterward, call your health plan and let them know that you had an emergency and where you received care.

**Only go to the hospital emergency room if it's an emergency**

Do not go to the emergency room for routine care. The emergency room is only for serious emergencies.

## Health care terms

### **appeal**

The action you take when you ask your health plan to reconsider a denied service or payment.

### **check-up**

A routine exam of your overall health. Also called a physical exam, a wellness check, or an annual exam.

### **coverage**

The services and benefits your plan will pay for.

### **denial or action**

When your plan does not approve or pay for a service.

### **formulary**

A list of prescription drugs your health plan covers. Also called a drug list.

### **health plan**

Any of these companies that contract with Washington State to cover your health care: Amerigroup, Columbia United Providers, Community Health Plan of Washington, Coordinated Care, Molina Healthcare, and United Healthcare Community Plan.

### **medical history**

Records of vaccinations, major health problems, treatments, and family members who have had major health problems.

### **naturopath**

A provider who uses a holistic approach and non-invasive treatments. Naturopaths try to avoid or reduce the use of surgery and drugs.

### **network**

The facilities, providers, and suppliers your health plan contracts with.

### **nurse practitioner**

An advanced registered nurse practitioner who has completed advanced coursework and clinical education beyond what is required for a registered nurse (RN).

### **physician assistant**

A healthcare professional who is licensed to practice medicine as part of a team under the direction of a doctor.

### **preventive health care**

Routine health care that includes screenings, check-ups, and patient counseling to prevent illnesses, disease, and other health problems or detect illness at an early stage. This includes well baby, child and adolescent check-ups, and adult preventive care, such as: breast, prostate, and colon cancer screening (mammograms, prostate exams, and colonoscopies).

### **primary care provider**

The doctor, physician assistant, nurse practitioner, naturopath, or clinic that is your main health care provider.

### **prior authorization**

When your health plan approves a service, treatment, prescription, or durable medical equipment that is medically necessary. Also called a referral or an authorization request.

### **provider**

A doctor, dentist, surgeon, physician assistant, nurse practitioner, naturopath, other health care professional, or clinic that provides health care.

### **ProviderOne**

The computer system that sends Services Cards to clients and manages the billing for your care.

### **referral**

When a primary care provider or a health plan sends you to a specialist. Also called prior approval.

### **Services Card**

The card you get from Apple Health that shows you have coverage. Also called a ProviderOne card. You will also receive a separate member ID card from your health plan.

### **specialist**

A doctor or health care professional who treats specific kinds of conditions or diseases, such as an oncologist (cancer doctor), an obstetrician (doctor who cares for pregnant women), or an orthopedist (broken bones or back pain).

### **wellness check**

An overall check on your health. Also called a check-up, a physical exam, or an annual exam.

## Primary care provider appointment checklist

Here's a checklist to help you remember everything before and during your appointment with a provider.

- Provider's name \_\_\_\_\_
- Provider's phone number \_\_\_\_\_ (to use if running late, change appt., etc.)
- Date of appointment \_\_\_\_\_
- Time of appointment \_\_\_\_\_
- Address \_\_\_\_\_
- Suite number \_\_\_\_\_
- Reason for appointment \_\_\_\_\_
- Discuss with provider's receptionist if you need an interpreter or special accommodations for mobility, speech, or hearing impairment
- Things to take to the appointment
  - List of medications
  - List of allergies
  - Medical history or records
  - Services Card (also called ProviderOne card)
  - Health plan ID card
  - Photo ID
  - Emergency name and contact information
  - Family member or friend
- Arrange transportation
- Arrange childcare
- Things to ask or tell your primary care provider
  - 1. \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2. \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3. \_\_\_\_\_
- Questions for your primary care provider
  - 1. \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2. \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3. \_\_\_\_\_