

First-timers' Guide to Washington Apple Health

Part 2: Making your first health care appointment

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 is the doctor, nurse, health care professional, or clinic you see for most of your health care.

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 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 PCP who speaks your language, specializes in your disability, or understands your culture as long as they're in your health plan's network. You can also specify if you have a preferred gender for your PCP.

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. Contact your health plan to learn how you can choose a different primary care provider.

If you are covered by Apple Health without a managed care plan, you must find a provider who accepts Apple Health using your ProviderOne services card. Find a contracted provider at <https://fortress.wa.gov/hca/p1findaprovider/>

Step 2: Make an appointment

You must have an appointment to see a provider.

Check the information your health plan sent you to see how to make your first appointment. You should be able to find your providers 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 English is not your preferred language or you are Deaf, DeafBlind, or Hard of Hearing, learn more at hca.wa.gov/interpreter-services, 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 be in person or 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

You may be eligible for help with transportation to your health care appointment. A regional broker contracted by the Health Care Authority will arrange the most appropriate transportation for you.

For information on how to request nonemergency medical transportation, visit hca.wa.gov/transportation-help.

Changing appointments

If you need to change or cancel an appointment, call your 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.

You may not be able to bring someone with you if you are using non-emergency transportation services.

Contact your transportation broker to learn more.

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.

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 ProviderOne services 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 okay 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 and ask questions before you leave the office.

Getting lab tests

Your primary care provider might order lab 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, 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.

Contact your health plan for help finding a pharmacy and filling prescriptions.

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.

Obstetric and gynecological services

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 check-ups with your OB/GYN are covered, as well as any follow-up care that might be needed. For pregnant individuals, regular care during pregnancy is covered.

Getting mental health treatment

Treatment for mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) 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 substance use disorder treatment services

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.

View Department of Health's Behavioral Health Agencies Directory to find a treatment agency near you: doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-02/606019-BHADirectory.pdf

You can also call the Washington Recovery Helpline at 1-866-789-1511 or visit [warecoveryhelpline.org](https://www.warecoveryhelpline.org).

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Call or text 988 or call 1-800-273-8255 (TTY users 1-800-799-4889) to be connected to a skilled trained counselor at a crisis center in your area any time.

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](#).

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

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

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: Community Health Plan of Washington, Coordinated Care, Molina Healthcare, UnitedHealthcare Community Plan, and Wellpoint Washington.

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 individuals), 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. _____