

Getting Referrals to Specialized Care

Member Fact Sheet



Important message to you from your health plan:

If your doctor wants you to see a specialist or wants you to get care somewhere else, this fact sheet will help you understand the process for getting the care you need.

Why do I need specialized care?

Your primary care provider, or PCP, is the first person you go to when you need health care. He or she makes sure you get the right care, in the right place, and at the right time.

Your PCP may want you to see a “specialist.” This is an expert in one part of the body or one type of illness. Examples are cardiologists and surgeons. Your PCP may also want you to go to a hospital, clinic, or other place for tests like lab work or x-rays. The care given by the specialist and other places is called “specialized care.”

What is a referral and why do I need one?

If you need specialized care, your PCP must ask for approval before you go. This request is known as a “referral.” This helps make sure you are sent to the right specialist or place to meet your needs.

Some specialized care may not need a referral. Your PCP will tell you if you need a referral.

How long does the referral process take?

Most referrals take one week to process. In some cases, your PCP may ask for a “rush” referral, which will take three (3) days.

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How will I know if my referral has been approved?

Once your referral is approved, the specialist or place will let you know when your appointment is. If your referral is not approved, you will get a letter telling you why. If you do not agree with this, you may file a complaint or appeal with L.A. Care.

How long will it take to get an appointment?

The time you must wait before you are seen depends on the availability of the specialist or place and on your need for treatment. If your appointment does not work you can ask the specialist or place for a different day or time. Talk to your PCP if you think you are not being seen soon enough.

Can I find my own specialist or place?

Most of the time your PCP will send you to a specialist or place that he or she already works with. This makes it easier for your PCP and the specialist or place to communicate with each other and get you the care you need. Talk to your doctor before he or she makes the referral if you want to go somewhere else.

What if I need help?

You may need help getting an appointment or talking to the specialist in your language. You may think the specialist is too far away. **The first thing you should do if you need help is talk to your doctor.** If you are an L.A. Care Medicare Advantage (HMO SNP) member, you can call us at 1-888-522-1298 (TTY: 1-888-212-4460). If you are a Medi-Cal, L.A. Care Covered, Healthy Kids, or PASC-SEIU member, you can call us at 1-888-839-9909 (TTY 1-866-522-2731). You can call us 24 hours a day 7 days a week (including holidays).