

How to Find a Primary Care Practitioner

A primary care practitioner (PCP) is typically your first resource when you have a medical concern, including mental health concerns. For the purpose of most health insurance plans, this is also the person to coordinate your care. Your PCP's role is to provide preventive care to you, such as conducting a physical exam. They can also identify and treat common medical concerns, like a cold. It is important that you build a relationship with a PCP. This happens by seeing them over an extended period of time, so they become familiar with your medical history and can help identify specialists that can treat any specific needs that come up. Your PCP can also help optimize your mental health by providing direct treatment and/or ensuring that you receive the mental health care you need and deserve.

How do I start my search for a Primary Care Practitioner?

- Contact your insurance company, either by phone or online, to obtain a list of available practitioners that qualify as PCPs in your area. PCP's can be internal medicine doctors, family practitioners, nurse practitioners or physician assistants. In some cases, a doctor who is an obstetrician/ gynecologist can also be a PCP.
- A personal referral is another good way to identify a PCP. You may want to ask for suggestions from friends or family members that you trust. You can also ask your child's pediatrician or your OB/midwife that helped you during your pregnancy whom they would recommend. When asking for suggestions, consider your own temperament and qualities of the individuals that you have found comforting. A family member or friend who likes someone who is more strict and to the point might not be a good fit for you if you are looking for someone that values spending time with their patients and is more available for questions or concerns.
- State level medical associations, nursing associations or physician assistant associations also maintain lists of who is practicing in your area and can make referrals to providers who are members of the association.

How do I choose a Primary Care Practitioner?

- Making the final decision is up to you. Below are some questions you may want to consider:
 - Do you prefer working with a male or female PCP?
 - Is the age of the PCP or the years of experience important to you?
 - If a PCP is recommended by someone, do you know why they would recommend them?
 - Does this practice or PCP accept your insurance?
 - Is the PCP's office staff or location important?
 - Do you need a PCP who is available to you online so you can access them when you have time rather than during the typical work day?
 - Do you want a PCP who has certain training or experience?
 - What are your current health needs? Are you generally in good health and do not anticipate needing to see your PCP often, or do you have an ongoing medical issue where you may need ongoing support and consultation?
 - Does the PCP offer urgent appointments and who covers when your PCP is away?

What should I do if I don't have health insurance?

- All Massachusetts residents are required to have health insurance. If you are concerned you cannot afford health insurance, you can apply for MassHealth coverage. To apply for MassHealth, call the MassHealth Enrollment Center at 888-665-9993 or go online to download an application at: <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/insurance/apply-for-masshealth.html>
- If you qualify for insurance through your work but have not enrolled because you are concerned about the costs, you may qualify for help for paying your premiums. To learn more about this option visit the Massachusetts Health Connector at: <https://www.mahealthconnector.org/>
- Having a baby is considered a “qualifying event,” which means you can revisit your benefits if you need to change your plan to ensure your baby is covered. If you had insurance available to you through your work but didn't take it for yourself, you can now choose to enroll to cover yourself and your baby.
- You can also talk with the hospital at the time of delivery to ensure that your child has MassHealth if you do not have other insurance. At the time of delivery, you can also enroll in MassHealth as well.
- If you are just not sure where to turn or you need help in applying, contact Health Care for All, which has a free helpline available Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm at 1-800-272-4232 or contact them at their website: <https://www.hcfama.org/>