



How to Get a Referral

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS ABOUT COORDINATING YOUR CARE

As a CHA patient, your health is our top concern. In order to meet your needs, your primary care team may refer you to a specialist or specialty service. This lets us understand your health and develop the best treatment plan. These questions and answers help explain the referral process.

If I have a health need that requires specialty care, where should I go?

Your CHA primary care team can help you with any specialty referral needs. Our doctors have selected a trusted group of local specialists to partner with to provide you care. In many cases these doctors are part of CHA, and all of them offer high quality care. These specialists will work closely with your primary care team to understand your needs and recommend treatments. This care coordination results in better health outcomes.

Not every specialist in your health plan network is connected with CHA. So please talk with your primary care team about your referral. We want you get the most integrated care and make sure that you do not have to pay out-of-pocket for specialty care.

How do I get a referral for non-emergency care?

If you think you need specialty care, please contact your primary care team to discuss a referral. We want to help you find the right service and specialist based on your medical history and symptoms. This is important, even if your health plan does not require a formal referral. You should also call your health plan to see what services are covered.

What rules does my health plan (insurance) have about referrals?

Most health plans have important rules about referrals. These vary by insurance company and by coverage plan. Please call the member services department at your health plan to find out about their rules for tests or specialist referrals.

For example, some plans (like HMOs) require your primary care doctor to choose a specialist for you, based on your needs. Plans that use preferred provider organizations (PPO) or point of service (POS) options may make you pay more to see a specialist that your doctor did not select. Other plans may make you pay for the entire bill (not just a co-pay or deductible) if you see a doctor outside of our preferred referral network.

Please note that you do not need a referral to choose an obstetric doctor. This is your right under Massachusetts law, and we strongly support this. Cambridge Health Alliance offers a wide range of obstetric care, including certified nurse-midwives and OB/GYN doctors. We also offer two locations for childbirth, our Cambridge Hospital maternity suite and our Cambridge Birth Center.

What if I want to see a different specialist, one that does not work at CHA or is not on my primary care doctor's preferred list?

Please talk to your primary care team if you have questions about a specialist or a specialty service. We feel it's important for you to stay within our established specialist network, but we know some patients have special concerns. By talking to us, we can help direct your care to the most appropriate provider and ensure that you will be getting the coordinated care you need.

Can I get a referral from my primary care provider after I see a specialist?

No. If you need a referral, please talk with your primary care team before you make a specialist appointment. Most health plans require a referral from your primary care provider ahead of time. Without a referral you may be responsible for the entire bill for that medical visit.

What if I am referred to a specialist when I am at the emergency room or in the hospital?

If you are in the emergency room or the hospital, you may see a specialist as part of your care. You may also be referred to a specialist. When you leave, it is important to call your CHA primary care team right away. This will keep us informed about your health needs, let us coordinate your follow-up care, and make sure that any specialty visits meet the requirements of your health plan.

Cambridge Health Alliance has three emergency department locations – at the Cambridge Hospital, Somerville Hospital, and Whidden Hospital campuses. All three are open 24 hours.

What if I need a referral when I am on vacation or out of town?

We hope you will never need specialty care when you are out of the area. But if you do, please check with your health plan. Insurance companies have different rules about out-of-area medical services. It is important for you to understand what services are covered when you seek non-emergency care outside their service area.

Who do I call if I have a question about a referral?

If you have a medical question about a referral, please contact your primary care team by phone or through MyCHART.

If you need information about what specialty services are covered by your health plan, please contact your plan's member services team. The phone number should be on your health insurance card.