

Timely Access to Health Care

Background

A common consumer complaint received at the DMHC Help Center is not being able to see a doctor on a timely basis. A 2009 study found that in Los Angeles, new PPO and HMO patients wait an average of 59 days to see a family practice physician.

Beginning January 17, 2010, California becomes the first state to establish standards regarding the time a patient has to wait to see a doctor.

Summary

- Each health plan must submit a proposal to the DMHC for complying with the required time standards, receive approval, and begin using the standards within one year of the effective date of the regulation. While these regulations set time standards, it also provides doctors flexibility in scheduling appointments, as long as doing so would not adversely affect the patient's condition.
- Health plans must ensure that its contracted provider network has adequate capacity and availability of licensed health care providers to offer enrollees appointments that meet the following timeframes:
 - Triage or screening by telephone 24-7
 - Waiting time for telephone triage no longer than 30 minutes
 - During normal business hours, waiting time to speak to a plan's customer service representative no longer than 10 minutes
 - 48 hours for urgent care appointments that do not require prior authorization
 - 96 hours for urgent care appointments requiring prior authorization (including specialists)
 - 10 business days for non-urgent primary care appointments
 - 15 business days for non-urgent appointments with specialists
 - 10 business days for non-urgent appointments with a mental health care provider
 - 15 business days for non-urgent appointments for ancillary services (x-rays, lab tests, etc.) for diagnosis or treatment of injury, illness, or other health condition
- Dental Plans
 - 72 hours for urgent care
 - 36 business days for non-urgent care
 - 40 business days for preventive care

Related Content

For the complete text of the regulation regarding timely access standards, please refer to:
<http://wps0.dmhc.ca.gov/regulations/docs/regs/20/1257296076228.pdf>

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