

Special Bulletin

For professional and facility providers

December 20, 2024

Accessibility Expectations: Changes for Professional Providers in All Regions

Reminders: Appointment Scheduling and Availability of Facility Services

Highmark recently updated its accessibility expectations for professional providers to align across all markets. Key changes include:

- Faster access to urgent care (immediate response)
- Shorter wait times for non-urgent appointments (48-72 hours) for both primary care physicians (PCPs) and behavioral health providers
- Routine care appointments within three weeks (with subsequent appointments within seven days)
- A new requirement for follow-up visits within five days of discharge or as clinically indicated

These changes also apply to providers who participate in Highmark Healthy Kids (CHIP*) program.

Reminder: Appointment Scheduling via Telephone

For members to schedule an appointment, the provider's phone number needs to be correctly listed in the Provider Directory. In addition, the phone must be answered in a timely manner.

No Preconditions on Scheduling an Appointment

Pre-appointment scheduling conditions must not be imposed on members requesting an appointment, such as completing forms or access to previous medical records prior to the provider scheduling the appointment.

The scheduling of the appointment must always be completed at the time the member calls the practice for an appointment. Appointments must be scheduled in compliance with the PCP and Medical Specialist/Behavioral Health Accessibility Expectations referenced below — not contingent on the member's ability or inability to complete paperwork.

To review the full list of accessibility standards for professional providers, visit the following sections in the *Highmark Provider Manual*:

- **Chapter 2: Product Information > Unit 3: Other Government Programs > [2.3 Highmark Healthy Kids \(CHIP\)](#) > [Accessibility Expectations for Highmark Healthy Kids \(CHIP\) Providers](#)**

- **Chapter 4: Provider Responsibilities & Guidelines > Unit 1: PCPs and Specialists > [4.1 PCP and Medical Specialist Accessibility Expectations > Accessibility Expectations for Providers.](#)**
- **Chapter 4: Provider Responsibilities & Guidelines > Unit 2: Behavioral Health Providers > [4.2 Accessibility Expectations for Behavioral Health > Accessibility Expectations.](#)**

Availability of Facility Services

Facility services need to be available to Highmark members on a 24/7 basis when medically appropriate and in accordance with industry standards. Physician services are provided by either hospital-based physicians or physicians employed by a facility. If physician services are provided to Highmark members on behalf of a facility, the facility must verify that physician has the appropriate training, education, and licensure to provide such services.

For more about facility services, go to the following section of the *Highmark Provider Manual*:

- **Chapter 4: Provider Responsibilities & Guidelines > Unit 3: Facility-Specific Guidelines > [4.3 Member Access to Facilities.](#)**

*CHIP is an acronym for Children's Health Insurance Program.

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