

Mental Health and Wellness FAQ

1. Will my employees need a referral from a doctor for mental health care?

No. For first-time appointments, they can call **1-888-287-2680**, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, to get help finding an appropriate provider. For follow-up visits, they can contact their mental health provider's office directly.

2. How will my employees find the right provider for their needs?

- For most situations, contacting one's primary care doctor is the best place to start for mental health care. Many mental health concerns can be effectively addressed in the primary care setting. Kaiser Permanente care locations have licensed mental health clinicians who work as part of the primary care team to provide assessment and short-term treatment.
- Members can also call **1-888-287-2680**, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. They will be asked a few questions to better understand their mental health needs. This information will help staff match them with the right specialist. They may be referred to a Kaiser Permanente clinician or a community provider we contract with, depending on care needs and location.

3. What should members do if they are experiencing a mental health crisis or have immediate needs after hours?

- For a mental health crisis – including life-threatening emergencies such as a drug overdose, suicide attempt, or threats of suicide – members should call 911 or go to the nearest emergency care facility.
- Members can call a consulting nurse for all other immediate needs after hours. They can get help anytime day or night from a telephone-based advice nurse at **1-800-297-6877**. The nurse can evaluate symptoms and provide recommendations about next steps, such as making an appointment, going to urgent care, or paging an on-call psychiatrist.

4. Can an employee continue using a provider they're seeing through an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)?

- If the EAP provider is in their plan network, they can continue seeing them once the EAP sessions are done.

- Even if the provider is not contracted with Kaiser Permanente, in many cases the member can continue to see them. Our goal is to support continuity of care whenever possible.

5. What should an employee do if they have an alcohol or drug addiction problem?

- We encourage members to discuss any health concerns, including substance use or possible addictive behavior with their primary care doctor. Our primary care locations have licensed mental health clinicians who work as part of the primary care teams to help with assessment and triage appropriately. As with all Kaiser Permanente care and services, we are committed to protecting the patient's privacy and confidentiality.
- Members can also call **1-888-287-2680** for an appointment with a mental health specialist. Members will be asked a few questions to better understand their specific needs. These questions will help match members with the right specialist. Members may be referred to a Kaiser Permanente clinician or a community provider in their plan network, depending on specific care needs and location.

6. Why is access to mental health resources such a big issue?

Access to mental health resources is not an issue specific to Kaiser Permanente or the state of Washington. It's a national problem – one that many states have struggled to address. Demand for care continues to grow while the mental health workforce is shrinking.

7. What are you doing to improve access to mental health care?

- At Kaiser Permanente Washington facilities, primary care physicians can instantly refer members to an on-site mental health social worker who can do follow-up appointments or refer members to an appropriate specialist.
- At Kaiser Permanente Washington primary care locations, we screen all patients 13 and up at their annual visits for common mental health concerns. Patients 18 and up are screened during all primary care visits.
- Members also have access to an embedded community health specialist at Kaiser Permanente Washington facilities. These health workers can help members find social service resources in their own communities.

- We have a staffing mix of mental health counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychiatric nurse practitioners to match members with a provider who can best address their issues.
- We contract with community providers to handle more routine psychosocial and emotional conditions, enabling specialists at Kaiser Permanente Mental Health to treat the patients who have more serious conditions.
- Members can choose to have video visits for follow-up appointments, when clinically appropriate.
- Primary care physicians can consult with a psychiatrist 24/7 on treating patients in their care.

8. How long does it take to get an appointment with a mental health specialist?

- If a member calls the Mental Health Access Center with an urgent need, they will be transferred immediately to a master's-level clinician who will conduct a full assessment, including safety planning as needed. We're able to do this because we are an integrated health system offering both coverage and care. As always, for a mental health crisis – including life-threatening emergencies such as a drug overdose, suicide attempt, or threats of suicide – members should call 911 or go to the nearest emergency care facility.
- For routine care, our goal is to schedule a first appointment within 14 days.

9. What if an employee wants to work on emotional issues on their own – issues like stress, for example?

We offer self-care resources that can help improve physical, mental, and emotional well-being. These tools include:

- Wellness coaching: A wellness coach is a health professional dedicated to teaching techniques to make positive life changes. They can help with issues like stress management, physical activity, healthy eating, and other health goals. Coaching sessions last about 20 minutes. Learn more at kp.org/wa/wellness-coach.
- Healthy lifestyle programs: These online programs can help members make positive health changes like losing weight, reducing stress, sleeping better, and quitting smoking. Learn more at kp.org/wa/healthy-lifestyles.