



AASPIRE

Healthcare Toolkit

Healthcare: Finding Providers

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Healthcare: Finding Providers

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1 What is this topic about?

This section is about how to find a healthcare provider, like a doctor, nurse practitioner, or physician's assistant. If you don't already have a healthcare provider, or if you want to change healthcare providers, this section gives some ideas about how to find a new one. It may not be possible to follow these suggestions in a step-by-step fashion. You may need to go through the steps more than once, or in a different order, before you find a healthcare provider you like. Not all steps or suggestions in this section may apply to you.

2 How do I find names of healthcare providers?

2.1 Option 1: Get referrals from people or organizations you know and trust.

For example, you could ask:

- **Friends, family, or co-workers** - Ask people you trust if they have a doctor they like. Someone you know might be able to give you first-hand information about what a healthcare provider and his or her office and staff are like.

- **Other professionals** - If you go to other healthcare professionals, or if you use a disability service or social service agency, ask them for recommendations.
- **Autism Groups or Communities** - If you are involved with a local autism group or community, either online or offline, you can ask there. These communities might be able suggest providers with experience working with people on the spectrum.
- **Hospitals** - Hospitals may have local physician referral services. Contact your local hospital and ask if it has a physician referral line or someone at its facility who can give physician referrals. Different hospitals may have different words for the people who offer this service. Often they are called referral specialists or health advocates. Ask if the hospital has a physician referral service that you can contact.

You can ask, "I'm looking for a healthcare provider. Do you have a physician referral service, health advocate, or someone who can help me find a provider?"

2.2 Option 2: If you have health insurance, get lists of providers covered by your plan.

Health insurance companies have lists of healthcare providers for you to choose from. These lists can usually be found on a web site, by calling the company on the telephone, or in a booklet sent to you by the company. People with public insurance can contact their state's [primary care office](#) to help find possible providers.

To get a list, you can ask, "I'm looking for a healthcare provider. Do you have a list of providers I can choose from?"

2.3 Option 3: What to do if you don't have health insurance.

You don't have to have health insurance to see a doctor. It may require some research to find what options are available in your area. Try asking about or searching for "free clinics," "low-cost clinics," "safety net clinics," "providers that accept self-pay patients," and "clinics that use a sliding scale." Some ways to search for these options are:

- Information and referral services such as [211](#).
- Search the Internet.
- Ask at your local hospital.
- If you go to other healthcare professionals, or if you use any disability or social service agencies, ask them for recommendations.
- Contact your state's [primary care office](#) to help find possible providers.

You can ask, "Do you have any information about free, low-cost, safety net, self-pay, or sliding scale clinics?"

2.4 Option 4: Online Internet searches

- **Regular Internet searching (e.g., Google)** - Search for 'family practice' or 'general internal medicine' (or whatever specialty you are looking for) and any other keywords that will help you narrow the search. For example, you may want to include the city or county where you live, or the name of a clinic that is convenient to you.
- **Licensing Boards and Professional Organizations** - If your state has a medical licensing board (most do) they may also offer provider lists or searches on the Internet or telephone. Doctors often belong to professional organizations that may offer information and doctor referrals on

their websites. The American Medical Association has a list of both [national](#) and [state](#) medical licensing organizations.

- **Medline Plus** has an extensive directory to help in locating health professionals, services and facilities.
- **Web Mapping Services** - Many of the popular search engines like Yahoo, Google or Bing offer mapping services. You can use these to locate providers in your area.

2.5 Option 5: Off-line searches

Searches for clinics or providers can be done offline through

- Yellow Pages listings or other directory listings.
- Contacting licensing boards, the American Medical Association, or other professional organizations on the telephone or in person.
- Traveling around your neighborhood and looking for clinics.

If you find a clinic or provider convenient to you, contact them or stop by their front desk and ask if they are accepting new patients at their practice.

If you're interested in a particular clinic, you can ask, "I'm interested in becoming a patient at your clinic. Are any healthcare providers at your clinic accepting new patients?"

If you're interested in a particular provider, you can ask, "I'm interested in establishing care with (provider's name). Is (provider's name) accepting new patients?"

3 How do I know if I can go to a healthcare provider or clinic?

The answers to these questions could change whether you are able to see a particular healthcare provider or not, so it's best to find out the answers before you schedule an appointment. If you find you can't go to a particular provider or clinic, you may have to find another provider or clinic to try.

3.1 If you have insurance, find out:

- Does the healthcare provider or clinic accept your insurance?

Ask, *"Do you take (insurance company name)?"*

- If yes, is the healthcare provider in-network or out-of-network? An in-network provider is someone who has agreed to see on that company's insurance plan at a reduced cost. The amount you have to pay to see an in-network provider is usually less than the amount you have to pay if you see an out-of-network provider. The insurance company may pay less or not pay anything for services you receive from an out-of-network provider.

Ask, *"Is (provider's name) in-network?"*

- If out-of-network, find out what your insurance will pay or not pay. Can you afford that? Is it worth it to still see this provider instead of a provider in your network? You will likely have to get this information from your insurance company, not the provider's office.

Ask, *"How much will be covered if I see an out-of-network provider?"*

- Not all insurance plans cover all treatments. If you need a certain kind of care or treatment, try to find out if your insurance will cover that.

3.2 If you don't have insurance, find out:

- Does the healthcare provider or clinic see patients who don't have insurance (self-pay)?

Ask, *"Do you see uninsured, self-pay patients?"*

- Is there a sliding scale or other low-cost option?

Ask, *"Do you have a sliding scale or other low-cost option for self-pay patients?"*

- Can you afford to pay what the provider or clinic is asking?

Ask, *"How much would it cost for me to see (provider's name)?"*

3.3 Important questions for everyone are:

- Is the healthcare provider taking new patients?

Ask, *"Is (provider's name) taking new patients?"*

- Do you have transportation to get to this healthcare provider or clinic?

This may be something you just find out on your own, or you could also ask the provider or clinic, *"What is the best way to get to your office (in a car, on a bus, walking from a location, etc.—whatever fits your situation)?"* or *"Can you help me arrange transportation to your office?"*

- Does the healthcare provider or clinic have office hours that work with your schedule?

This may be something you just find out on your own or you can ask, *"What are your office hours?"* or *"Does (provider's name) have office hours during (time that works with your schedule)?"*

- How long will it be before you can get a new patient appointment? If the appointment will be too far out to meet your needs, you might want to consider looking for a healthcare provider who can see you sooner.

Ask, "Will (provider's name) be able to see me before (date you need to see them by)?" or "How long would it take to get an appointment with (provider's name)?"

4 How do I know if a healthcare provider is a good choice?

4.1 Do research or ask questions in advance.

You can learn some things about a provider or clinic before your appointment by:

- Looking up the provider or clinic on the Internet.
- Asking people you know for their opinions about the provider or clinic.
- Contacting the office staff and ask them questions.

Some questions you might want answered are listed in the next section Questions to Consider. You might not be able to answer all these questions before your appointment.

4.2 Questions to Consider

These questions can be good to consider when making a decision about whether to see or continue seeing a healthcare provider. Some questions may not be important to you. That's OK; you can just ignore them. You may not be able to answer many of these questions until you have had one or more visits with the provider.

- Do the healthcare provider and office staff have the right credentials and training?
- Do they have an accessible way for you to communicate with them (example: secure messaging system, alternatives to telephone)?
- Do they have knowledge of autism or experience with people on the autism spectrum?
- Do they have knowledge or experience with your medical problems (if your medical problems are uncommon)?
- Do they have attitudes you agree with about autism or disability?
- Do they have communication skills and style that work well with yours?
- Are they willing and able to make the accommodations you need?
- Do they respect your right to self-determination?
- Are they interested in including you in your care?
- Do you like their approach to medicine?
- Do they have the resources in their office or clinic that you need or want? Examples: care manager, social worker, "medical home", secure messaging, on-site lab/pharmacy.

Tip: Doctors in the United States are licensed in the state where they practice. Check your state's website to find out what office deals with medical licenses. Many have a place where you can search for a doctor's license by name. They should also be able to tell you if any complaints have been filed against that doctor. If you don't have access to the Internet, try your state's Information and Referral Line (such as [211](#)) or look in the state section of your phone book for an office that handles medical licenses.

4.3 Think about how things are going after the first few visits.

After you've seen the provider one, two, or three times, ask yourself the "Questions to Consider" again. Sometimes it takes a while to learn if a provider will meet your needs.

5 What if a provider turns out to be a bad fit for me?

If this isn't a good fit, it's OK to switch to another provider. (But, sometimes relationships take time and no relationship is perfect.)

6 Should I disclose my ASD diagnosis to my healthcare provider?

Whether to tell your provider about your ASD diagnosis is your choice. In most cases, the benefits of disclosing a diagnosis far outweigh the risks, but you need to weigh the risks and benefits for yourself to know what is right for you. In general, telling your provider may help them better understand you and make working with you easier (but some providers may also need some education). For more information on the possible benefits and risks of disclosure, see the section in Your Rights in Healthcare on Disclosure.

7 Summary

Finding A Provider - Healthcare providers can be found by:

- Asking people or organizations you know and trust (for example, friends and family, other professionals, autism groups, or hospitals).

- Through listings provided by your health insurance provider (if you have insurance).
- Searching for safety-net or self-pay clinics (if you do not have insurance).
- Searching on the Internet, including using links provided by licensing boards and professional medical organizations.
- Searching off-line, including through Yellow Pages, contacting professional organizations off-line, or looking physically for a convenient provider or clinic in your neighborhood.

Knowing If You Can See a Provider - Make sure:

- The provider takes your insurance (if you have insurance) and that you can pay for the in-network or out-of-network service.
- The provider takes self-pay patients (if you don't have insurance) and that you can pay for the service.
- The provider is taking new patients.
- That you can get to the provider when you need to.

Knowing If the Provider Is a Good Choice - Some ways to figure out if a provider is a good fit for you are:

- Find out information about the provider by looking them up on the Internet, asking people you trust for their opinions, and contacting the provider's office.
- Schedule a "getting to know you" visit with the new provider.
- See the provider a few more times, and think about how the visits went.
- Use the list of "Questions to Consider" as a guide to some things that might be important to think about in figuring out if a healthcare provider is a good match for you.

What to Do If the Provider Was a Bad Choice - If after a few visits you don't feel comfortable with a particular healthcare provider, it's absolutely OK to see a different provider.

Disclosure - It's your choice if you want to tell your new healthcare provider about autism. Telling your provider may help them better understand you and make working with you easier (but some providers may also need some education about autism).

8 Links and Resources

- [Your Healthcare Information Guide](#) - This site contains a whole host of resources, guides and links to a variety of healthcare topics written in plain language. It was created by a husband and wife team who are currently working in healthcare fields.
- [Get Affordable Healthcare](#) - Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) is the primary Federal agency for improving access to health care services for people who are uninsured, isolated or medically vulnerable. Their website has a list of resources for the uninsured as well as a search engine that can be used to search for community or safety-net clinics by geographic area.
- [211](#) - State Information and Referral system for help with food, housing, employment, health care, counseling and more.