

Reminders - Appointment availability standards & hours availability requirements

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Reminder — Medical specialty providers appointment availability standards

To ensure members maintain timely access to care, the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) contractually requires Summit Community Care to ensure participating providers adhere to specific appointment availability standards. Adherence to appointment availability standards is also a requirement for maintaining National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) accreditation.

As a result, Summit Community Care has agreed to make these standards an obligation for our participating practitioners. Our provider manual also outlines the requirement to adhere to these standards and lists the specific appointment standard by provider or service type. Please note, where there is a variance in the standard between the DHS and NCQA requirements, Summit Community Care adopts the more stringent standard.

Summit Community Care uses a third-party vendor to conduct two surveys throughout the year to assess a practitioner's ability to schedule appointments within the defined timelines. Practitioners are obligated to participate in the *Appointment Availability Survey* if chosen in the random selection.

Summit Community Care will notify any practitioners deemed noncompliant with appointment scheduling standards following review of survey findings. Noncompliant practitioners will receive a written letter outlining any areas of noncompliance. Providers who receive the letter must complete an attached form describing the action(s) taken, or to be taken, to remedy the areas of noncompliance. While the survey protocol ensures random selection of providers, any provider noncompliant in the prior survey is included in the next survey.

Quality Committees for Summit Community Care review all survey results. The following may result in further action, up to and including potential termination from the provider

network:

- Refusal to participate in *Appointment Availability Surveys*
- Recurring noncompliance with defined standards based on survey results
- Recurring failure to respond to requests for written remedy when noncompliant

Appointment availability standards for medical specialty providers are as follows

Specialty care providers (non-OB/GYN)	
Routine care (<i>non-urgent</i>)	Within 60 calendar days
Preventive or well-visits	Within 30 calendar days
Urgent care	Within 24 hours
Emergency care	Within 24 hours

Important tips:

- Member access to **routine care** standard: Offering appointment availability with a different practitioner within the same group or agency would constitute compliance as long as the appointment is within the timelines defined above.
- Member access to **urgent care** standard: Scheduling the member within 24 hours **or** referral to the nearest Urgent Care Center is a compliant response to the survey if there is a participating Urgent Care Center within the vicinity. Referral to the emergency room is noncompliant on the survey question related to urgent care needs.

Appointment wait times

In addition to requirements to adhere to appointment availability standards defined above, Summit Community Care maintains specific requirements for wait times within the provider's office. Waiting time at the specialty provider's office should not exceed 45 minutes from the scheduled appointment time, except when the provider is unavailable due to an emergency. Providers are allowed to be delayed in meeting scheduled appointment times when they work on urgent cases, when a serious problem is found, or when the member has an unknown need that requires more services or education than was described at the time the appointment was scheduled.

What if I need assistance?

If you have questions about this communication or need assistance with any other item, contact your local Provider Relations representative or call Provider Services toll free at **844-462-0022**.

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Reminder – PCP after-hours availability requirements

To ensure members have access to quality, comprehensive healthcare services, Summit Community Care requires participating primary care providers (PCPs) to ensure coverage availability 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Adherence to this availability standard is also a requirement for maintaining National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) accreditation. Providers may review the below after-hours availability requirements in the [provider manual](#) for Summit Community Care on the public portal.

PCPs must maintain one of the following arrangements for members to access the office after normal business hours:

- Have the office telephone answered after hours by an answering machine that can contact the PCP or another designated network medical practitioner:
 - The PCP or designated network practitioner must return all calls answered by an answering service within 60 minutes.
- Have the office telephone answered after normal business hours by a recording in the language of each of the major population groups served by the PCP, directing the member to call another number to reach the PCP or another provider designated by the PCP:
 - Someone must be available to answer the designated provider's telephone. Another answering service is not acceptable and considered noncompliant.
- Have the office telephone transferred after hours to another location where someone will answer the telephone and be able to contact the PCP or designated Summit Community Care network medical practitioner:

- The PCP or designated medical practitioner must return all calls within 60 minutes.

Note: For emergency treatment after hours, either the answering service or answering machine may direct members to call **911** or go to the nearest emergency room.

The following telephone answering procedures are noncompliant:

- Office telephone is only answered during normal business hours.
- Office telephone is answered after hours by a recording that tells the member to leave a message.
- Office telephone is answered after hours by a recording that directs the member to go to an emergency room for any services needed.
- After-hours calls are returned outside of the 60-minute window.

Summit Community Care uses a third-party vendor to conduct two surveys throughout the year to assess PCP after-hours availability. PCPs are obligated to participate in the *After-Hours Availability Survey* if chosen in the random selection.

Summit Community Care will notify PCPs deemed noncompliant following review of survey findings. Noncompliant PCPs will receive a written letter outlining any areas of noncompliance. PCPs who receive the letter must complete an attached form describing the action(s) taken, or to be taken, to remedy the areas of noncompliance. While the survey protocol ensures random selection of PCPs, any PCP noncompliant in the prior survey is included in the next survey.

Quality Committees for Summit Community Care review all survey results. The following may result in further action, up to and including potential termination from the provider network:

- Refusal to participate in *After-Hours Availability Surveys*
- Recurring noncompliance with defined standards based on survey results
- Recurring failure to respond to requests for written remedy when noncompliant

What if I need assistance?

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Reminder — PCPs: appointment availability standards

To ensure members maintain timely access to care, the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) contractually requires Summit Community Care to ensure participating providers adhere to specific appointment availability standards. Adherence to appointment availability standards is also a requirement for maintaining NCQA accreditation.

As a result, Summit Community Care has agreed to make these standards an obligation for our participating practitioners. Our provider manual also outlines the requirement to adhere to these standards and lists the specific appointment standard by provider or service type. Please note, where there is a variance in the standard between the DHS and NCQA requirements, Summit Community Care adopts the more stringent standard.

Summit Community Care uses a third-party vendor to conduct two surveys throughout the year to assess a practitioner's ability to schedule appointments within the defined timelines. Practitioners are obligated to participate in the *Appointment Availability Survey* if chosen in the random selection.

Summit Community Care will notify any practitioners deemed noncompliant with appointment scheduling standards following review of survey findings. Noncompliant practitioners will receive a written letter outlining any areas of noncompliance. Providers who receive the letter must complete an attached form describing the action(s) taken, or to be taken, to remedy the areas of noncompliance. While the survey protocol ensures random selection of providers, any provider noncompliant in the prior survey is included in the next survey.

Quality Committees at Summit Community Care review all survey results. The following may result in further action, up to and including potential termination from the provider network:

- Refusal to participate in *Appointment Availability Surveys*
- Recurring noncompliance with defined standards based on survey results
- Recurring failure to respond to requests for written remedy when noncompliant

Appointment availability standards for PCPs are as follows:

Primary care providers	
Routine care (<i>non-urgent</i>)	Within 21 calendar days
Preventive or well-visits	Within 30 calendar days
Urgent care	Within 24 hours
Emergency care	Within 24 hours

Important tips:

- Member access to **routine care** standard: Offering appointment availability with a different practitioner within the same group or agency would constitute compliance as long as the appointment is within the timelines defined above.
- Member access to **urgent care** standard: Scheduling the member within 24 hours **or** referral to the nearest Urgent Care Center is a compliant response to the survey if there is a participating Urgent Care Center within the vicinity. Referral to the emergency room is noncompliant on the survey question related to urgent care needs.

Appointment wait times

In addition to requirements to adhere to appointment availability standards defined above, Summit Community Care maintains specific requirements for wait times within the provider's office. Waiting time at the PCP provider's office should not exceed

45 minutes from the scheduled appointment time, except when the provider is unavailable due to an emergency. Providers are allowed to be delayed in meeting scheduled appointment times when they work on urgent cases, when a serious problem is found, or when the member has an unknown need that requires more services or education than was described at the time the appointment was scheduled.

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