

Tips for Referral Coordinators

Project Access Northwest is dedicated to helping low-income and uninsured patients access the care they need. A referral from a primary care provider is the first step... and it's important to get it right. Please review the following information to understand how referrals are handled.

Timely handling of referrals

Referrals are requests for additional care, usually of a specialty nature, by a primary care provider or by a specialist needing additional medical information on behalf of the patient. Referrals are generally handled as one of three categories: **emergency/emergent, urgent** and **routine**. **Project Access Northwest cannot accept referrals marked URGENT or EMERGENCY. They will be returned.**

Emergency/emergent referrals (per MAA) are for services provided for care required after the sudden onset of a medical condition manifesting itself by acute symptoms of sufficient severity (including severe pain) such that the absence of immediate medical attention could reasonably be expected to result in:

- Placing the client's health in serious jeopardy;
- Serious impairment to bodily functions; or
- Serious dysfunction of any bodily organ or part.

Primary care patients meeting this criteria should be referred to the closest emergency room. If the patient is in a primary care clinic, call 911.

Urgent referrals are for services the patient needs quickly. The referral needs to be made for specialty care within one to three days (24 to 72 hours). If there is referral handling on site, the ideal time frame to handle an urgent referral is 30 minutes. However, the community standard is one to three days, with 24 hours being the most common standard. **Project Access Northwest cannot accept referrals marked URGENT.**

NOTE: Providers should not request urgent referrals for patients "wanting" expedited care as in camp physicals, sports physicals or travel. Providers should not request urgent referrals because they want their referrals processed more quickly. Please see *Handling Expedited Referrals* below.

Routine Referrals or non-urgent referrals are to be handled within 4+ days. Often the referral cannot be processed until the patient completes needed financial information, as many specialty care provider groups request that patient financial information accompany the referral when the patient has no insurance. Our care coordinators cannot process a referral for specialty care unless the patient is currently enrolled in Project Access Northwest and any needed specialty requirements such as labs, imaging, and/or specific office visits notes are included.

Handling expedited referrals

Expedited (quick) referrals alerts our care coordinators that the primary care provider wants the referral handled outside our routine process. Project Access Northwest will honor this request when the following requirements are met:

- The patient must be enrolled in Project Access Northwest; enrollment information is needed if the patient is not currently enrolled.
- The reason the referral needs to be expedited should be included in the referral so the specialist has this information as well.
- Any labs, OV notes or current imaging helpful to the specialist should be included as well.

OUR VISION: *Everyone in our community will have access to appropriate health care services.*

For more information, please contact Project Access Northwest: info@projectaccessnw.org or 206-788-4204.