

Your Primary Care Doctor Is Your Partner in Health

Who is a primary care doctor?

- Your primary care doctor is your health care partner for preventive care and medical treatment. He or she can also give you a referral to a specialist if you need one.
- A primary care doctor can be a general or family practitioner (for all ages), a pediatrician (for infants, children and adolescents), or an internist (for adults).
- In Washington state, you may also receive primary care from a nurse practitioner (NP), a registered nurse who has received additional training to provide primary care directly to patients and who may practice independently or in a doctor's office.
- Your primary care doctor will likely work with a team of other health care professionals, so you may be seen primarily by a nurse practitioner or a physician assistant (PA).

What does a primary care doctor do?

- Your primary care doctor is trained to care for you as a whole person throughout your life.
- Because your primary care doctor sees you often, he or she develops a complete picture of your needs and concerns, monitors your health challenges over time, and learns how to best help you.
- Your primary care doctor will diagnose and treat illnesses, including chronic conditions such as asthma, depression, diabetes and heart disease.
- He or she also focuses on keeping you healthy and improving your health by providing screenings, vaccinations, and helpful advice and resources on lifestyle changes and wellness.
- Your primary care doctor works with you to prevent illnesses and conditions before they develop.
- He or she will help coordinate your care if you have surgery, are hospitalized, or receive care from specialists.

Why have a primary care doctor?

- **Relationship:** The ongoing relationship between you and your primary care doctor means your doctor knows your personal health history, your life circumstances, and how best to share information with you. With something as personal as your health, it's important to have a strong relationship with a primary care doctor you trust.
- **Coordination:** You may find yourself dealing with several doctors or other health care professionals for special issues or surgery. If that happens, your primary care doctor will be the person who has the whole picture of all your treatments and medications and can help coordinate your treatment.
- **Prevention:** Prevention is the best way for you to stay as healthy as you can. Your primary care doctor helps you with lifestyle changes that may reduce your health risks. He or she focuses on prevention through screenings, inoculations, and early detection of potential problems.

How does having a primary care doctor help you?

- Research shows that people who have an ongoing relationship with a primary care doctor have better overall health outcomes and lower death rates than those people without a primary care doctor.
- Research also shows that those with a primary care doctor save money in the long run. One reason for that savings is the primary care doctor's focus on prevention.
- When you have a primary care doctor, you're never on your own with your health care.

Our health and the health care system can be full of challenges. Building a strong relationship with a caring and skilled primary care doctor can make your life better in many ways. Learn how to find one at www.wacommunitycheckup.org/ownyourhealth.