

Behavioral Health Provider Appointment Availability Survey Guide

QUICK REFERENCE

Behavioral Health Appointment Timeliness Standards

Appointment type	Time frame
Urgent appointment (when prior authorization is not required)	48 hours
Urgent appointment (when prior authorization is required)	96 hours
Non-Urgent appointment with a specialty physician (psychiatrist)	15 business days
Non-Urgent appointment with a non-physician mental health or substance use disorder provider	10 business days
Non-Urgent follow-up appointment with a non-physician mental health or substance use disorder provider	10 business days

Understanding the Survey Questions

Surveyor asks: “Urgent care services are for a condition which requires prompt attention but does not rise to the level of an emergency. When is the next available appointment date and time with the provider for urgent services?”

You should provide the earliest appointment time you would offer a patient who is in crisis, whether it is a new or established patient, and whether the appointment is via telehealth or in-person.

For example, if an established patient called you today in crisis:

- If you are able to see them via telehealth as soon as possible (e.g., at 6 p.m. today), you would tell the surveyor, **“I would offer an appointment today at 6 p.m.”**
- If you are able to see them in-person as soon as possible (e.g., tomorrow afternoon at 5 p.m.), you would tell the surveyor, **“I would offer an appointment tomorrow at 5 p.m.”**

Surveyor asks: “When is the next available appointment date and time with the provider for non-urgent services?”

You should provide the earliest appointment time you would offer a patient who needs a non-urgent appointment, whether it is a new or established patient, and whether the appointment is via telehealth or in-person.

For example, if an established patient called you today requesting a non-urgent appointment and:

- You have availability to see them via telehealth at the end of this week, you could tell the surveyor, “I would offer an appointment this Friday at 3 p.m.”
- You have availability to see them in-person next week, you could tell the surveyor, “I would offer an appointment next Wednesday at 9 a.m.”

In this example, the earliest appointment available is “this Friday at 3 p.m.” and is the best answer to provide the surveyor.

Surveyor asks: “What is the earliest date and time an existing patient being seen today could schedule a non-urgent follow-up appointment with the provider? If recurring appointments are scheduled in advance, you can respond with the next regularly scheduled appointment for an existing patient being seen today.”

This question will only be posed to non-physicians. You should provide the next appointment time you have scheduled for a patient you are seeing today who needs to be seen at least twice a month OR the next open appointment slot on your calendar, whichever is sooner. For example, suppose:

- You are seeing a patient today who already has their next appointment scheduled in the near future. Suppose they have an appointment scheduled for one week from today at 1 p.m.
- Additionally, suppose the next open appointment slot on your calendar is three weeks in the future.

In this example, the best answer to provide the surveyor is the earliest appointment, which is the appointment scheduled for one week from today at 1 p.m.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why have I received so many appointment availability surveys?

The Provider Appointment Availability Survey (PAAS) is mandated by a California regulator, the Department of Managed Health Care (DMHC). The DMHC mandates that health plans adhere to a DMHC-specified survey methodology that requires each health plan operating in the state of California to survey a random sample of providers in each county. Thus, you may be surveyed multiple times on behalf of different health plans you contract with. You may even be surveyed multiple times on behalf of a single health plan inquiring about your availability at your practice locations in different California counties.

Can I opt out?

Providers cannot opt out of PAAS. These surveys are part of our quality and compliance functions, and you are required to participate. If you do not respond, DMHC will expect us to follow up, provide feedback, verify your contact information, and even request corrective action.

When does the survey take place?

Most health plans field PAAS between July and December each year.

How is the survey administered?

If you have provided your email address or fax number to Health Net*, you will initially be surveyed by email or fax. If you do not respond to the email or fax survey, Health Net's survey vendor will then call you to complete the survey. If you do not answer the initial call, the surveyor will leave a message including a phone number you can call at any time during business hours to complete the survey. Note that once the surveyor leaves you a voicemail, you must complete the survey within two business days or you will be considered a non-responder.

What is the difference between an urgent appointment and a non-urgent appointment?

Urgent services are for a condition which requires prompt attention but does not rise to the level of an emergency. In the behavioral health setting, urgent care is care for a condition or situation which, if left untreated, could lead to serious injuries or impairment of the patient or those in the patient's vicinity. Examples of non-urgent care are routine outpatient therapy and medication management appointments.

What types of behavioral health services are within the scope of the survey?

Outpatient appointments addressing mental health or substance use disorders are within the scope for PAAS.

How should I prepare for the survey?

- Review appointment timeliness standards with office staff and/or your answering service.
- Confirm understanding of the survey questions.
- If same day appointments or walk-ins are available, let the surveyor know.
- Ensure your contact information on file with Health Net is up to date.

How can I learn more about the survey?

If you want to learn more about the survey or have specific questions, please email us at ProviderSurveys@healthnet.com.