THE HEALTH CONNECTION

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APWU Health Plan's Quarterly Newsletter

Focusing On Quality To Improve Health

We believe quality is critical to protecting and improving your health and well-being, which is why we are committed to:

- Supporting you and your doctor to help you stay healthy or return to health if you become ill.
- Providing responsive customer service.
- Making sure you are satisfied with our services.



Our Directory of Providers

Today, we have two of the largest provider networks in the world. Both networks give members and potential members instant access to information about providers to insure that they select a provider who fits their needs. Location is important as well. Less travel time to see your provider makes a visit to the doctor's office easier. There are almost 1 million providers in each network spanning the entire United States and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

High Option	U.S. Virgin Islands
Providers - 882,885	Providers - 396
Hospitals - 6,227	Hospitals - 2
Ancillary - 38,073	Ancillary - 54

Finding Health Care Solutions

Need emergency care immediately? Go directly to any emergency facility or call 911. Emergencies include serious accidents or illnesses, uncontrolled bleeding, seizure, loss of consciousness, chest pain or shortness of breath, among other things.

Need after-hours care and not sure what to do? Call your doctor or an on-call doctor to provide advice or urgent treatment, or you can call (800-582-1314) our health information line and speak with one of our nurses.

Need urgent care that requires prompt medical attention? Call your personal doctor and request to be seen within 24 to 48 hours, or visit an urgent care center or convenience care clinic for symptomatic illnesses and infections.

Need emergency care and you've reached a voicemail? If this is an emergency, hang up and immediately dial 911.

Need symptomatic regular and routine care? Schedule a visit so that you're seen within seven to 14 days, or within the time frame specified by your treating doctor.

Need preventive screenings and a physical? Schedule a visit so that you're seen within 30 days.

To ensure you have the support you need, we offer toll-free access (800-582-1314) to health care professionals who will speak with you one-on-one, Monday through Friday, 9am to 9pm, and Saturdays 9am to 2pm. You may also login to **myCareAllies.com** for additional information and resources.

Brought to you by Cigna





We know that there are a lot of choices out there for health care plans but by choosing the APWU Health Plan, you made the *best* choice, the best choice for you and your family! Choosing the health plan that is right for you is an important decision. You can take comfort in knowing that you have chosen a plan that is both comprehensive and driven by customer service. The APWU Health Plan doesn't look at our members as numbers, but rather as clients—clients we are eager to serve, impress and retain.

Our plan, created 56 years ago, is tried and true and we have the numbers to prove it. We are especially proud of our retention rate, which is an amazing 95%! That means that 95% of our members stay with our plan from year to year, becoming loyal members. Loyal members are our best form of advertising as well as our greatest motivation to keep up our efforts.

Our customer service includes:

- 97% of claims processed within 15 days by an educated coding staff
- Customer service calls answered on average in 1 minute, 30 seconds with 29 seconds being the quickest response time in the second quarter
- Issues resolved on the initial call 95% of the time
- Customer service accuracy rate of 98.85%, with a corporate goal of 98%

Although a 95% retention rate is certainly worth bragging about, the APWU will never settle for good enough. Because of our commitment to our members, we are constantly seeking ways to even further improve the customer service experience. Not only do our customer service representatives complete an extensive new-hire training program, they are required throughout their career to participate in continuing education courses. We also hold our organization, in general, to high standards and participate in regular audits—internal and external—in order to better identify the areas in which we excel and the areas in which we could improve so that we may best serve our members. Our members deserve a high level of service and are we focused on delivering just that!

Our internal audits are conducted daily on claims processing and call responses, and are performed by our on-site quality control department. Our external audits are performed by third-party consulting firm Mercer and take place quarterly and yearly. The numbers are indisputable and prove that our Plan exceeds industry standards.

- Payment (APWUHP 99.51%, FEHB Minimum 97%)
- Administrative (APWUHP 99.71%, FEHB Minimum 95%)
- Financial accuracy (APWUHP 99.72%, FEHB Minimum 99.0%)





SPEAK UP

We also support and encourage you to follow these "**SPEAK UP**" guidelines and reminders, offered by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations, to help ensure you are an active participant in your health care:

Speak up if you have questions or concerns – don't hesitate to talk with your doctor.

Pay attention to the care you are receiving.

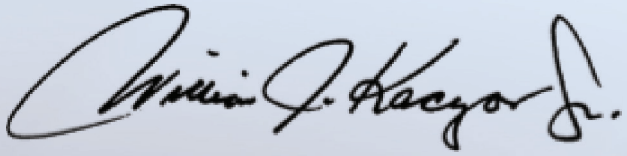
Educate yourself about your diagnosis, medical tests and treatment plan.

Ask a trusted family member or friend to be your health care advocate.

Know the medications you take and why you take them.

Use a health care organization that has undergone a rigorous onsite evaluation by an independent accrediting agency.

Participate in all decisions about your treatment.



Patient Safety Resources

We encourage practices to help ensure your safety as a patient. We do this by promoting communication between your health care professionals, and by offering a variety of tools and services to help you make smart, safe decisions about your health.

- We promote smooth continuity and coordination of care between primary care, specialist and behavioral health care professionals. In cases when you are receiving treatment from two types of doctors for the same diagnosis, we encourage you to inform them of this and allow an exchange of information between them. Your confidentiality will be respected.
- Our Disease Management Program alerts you and your doctor of possible critical gaps in care, such as missing preventive care screenings or delays filling your prescriptions.

Smoking Cessation Options

Multiple options, same success

According to Reuters Health, smoking cessation pills are about as effective as nicotine patches or lozenges at helping people successfully quit, a U.S. study suggests. Researchers gave more than 1,000 smokers counseling to help them quit and randomly assigned them to receive three months of treatment with either lozenges plus patches, patches alone or varenicline, a cessation drug sold as Chantix in the U.S.

After a year, roughly one in five smokers successfully kicked the habit regardless of which treatment they used, the researchers report, though there were more side effects such as insomnia, nausea, and constipation with varenicline (drug). "The results suggest that the widely available, simple to use, nicotine patch can produce long-term smoking cessation rates that are similar to those produced by more intense treatments," said lead study author Timothy Baker, a public health researcher at the University of Wisconsin.

At the start of the study, participants were around 48 years old and had been smokers for about two decades. They smoked 17 cigarettes a day on average, a bit less that a typical pack in the U.S. After 26 weeks, researchers asked them if they had smoked at all in the previous seven days and did lab tests to see if the level of carbon monoxide in their breath was low enough to confirm they had indeed refrained from smoking.

Among 241 people assigned to use nicotine patches, 55 of them, or about 23 percent, were confirmed non-smokers at 26 weeks. In the group of 424 people given varenicline (drug), 100 of them, or about 24 percent, were confirmed abstinent at that point in the study. So were 113 of the 421 people who used a combination of patches and lozenges, or about 27 percent of this group. The differences between the groups were too small to be statistically meaningful. After one year, 21 percent of the people using patches had quit, as had 19 percent of people taking varenicline and 20 percent of individuals given a combination of patches and lozenges. At this point, too, the differences weren't statistically significant. You can conclude from the study that cessation drugs are about as effective as nicotine patches and/or lozenges.

Article by Lisa Rapaport, Smoking cessation pill no better than nicotine patches or lozenges, Reuters Health-online, Tue Jan 26, 2016 11:16am EST , The study was supported by the U.S. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.

Benefits Bulletin: Tobacco Cessation

100% coverage in-network for:

- Counseling by telephone, group therapy sessions, or educational sessions with a doctor
- Prescription drugs by mail order approved by the FDA to treat tobacco dependence
- Over-the-counter drugs approved by the FDA to treat tobacco dependence

Health Risk Assessment

15 minutes can change your health

Your health is your most important asset. Now there's a tool on your personalized website that can help you take good care of it. Our health assessment is a quick, confidential survey that examines your health status so you can get answers to pressing questions you may have about your health. Want to know which preventive screenings to consider? Need to lower your cholesterol? Interested in losing weight? Here's how your individual survey results can help:

- When you answer questions about your lifestyle habits, health history, weight, cholesterol, blood pressure, etc., you will get customized feedback that explains your risks for certain health conditions, and how to maintain or improve your health.
- Based on your answers, you may be able to participate in an online health coaching program that shows you how to make lifestyle changes over the course of a few weeks.
- You can discuss your risks with your doctor and develop steps for lowering your risk factors.

Benefits Bulletin: Health Risk Assessment

As an incentive for completing the Health Risk Assessment, you will receive dental care discounts through CignaPlus Savings, a discount dental program. For more information on this program call 800-222-2798.

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Attacking Asthma

Many people who have family members suffering from asthma or have suffered themselves understand this chronic disease that affects the airways and lungs is nothing to take lightly. Asthma is a serious health problem affecting over 18 million adults and over 7 million children in the U.S. with approximately nine asthma related deaths daily.

An asthma attack causes swelling of the airways, restricting the ability to breathe, and can vary in severity from mild to fatal. The symptoms include coughing, shortness of breath, wheezing, chest tightness and pain. No one knows with certainty what causes asthma and there is currently no cure; but there are effective medical treatments to help sufferers manage the disease.



Asthma Triggers

If you have asthma beware of common triggers:

- Allergens (mold, dust, pollen, animal dander)
- Exercise
- Poor air quality (pollution, chemical toxins)
- Smoking (tobacco, cigarette)
- Respiratory infections

Treatment includes:

- Immediate symptom relief
- Long-term management though physician-prescribed medication
- Avoiding known triggers

Generally, inhaled corticosteroids are prescribed to clear the airways and quickly combat an attack. There are a number of effective medications so a long-term asthma management plan should be explored to address your individual needs. If you believe you have asthma see your doctor to develop a treatment plan to determine which medicines would works best for you.