



MY HART

Michigan Youth Healthcare Access Resource Toolkit

*A Guide to Navigating Healthcare
for Adolescents and Young Adults*



michigan organization on
adolescent sexual health

This document is a product of the Michigan Organization on Adolescent Sexual Health (MOASH) - written, researched, and compiled by MOASH's youth advisory council members. Thanks especially to Xander Hazel-Groux (primary author and researcher), Brittany Batell (editor), and Divya Reddy (graphic creator and researcher) for their work.

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE:

The purpose of this guide is to provide information about sexual and reproductive healthcare for adolescents and young adults ages 13-24.

In it, you'll find information on your medical rights, how to navigate healthcare systems, and things to think about before, during, and after seeking care. This document was created by youth, for youth, and is a living document, which means it will be updated from time to time.

This guide focuses on understanding and accessing sexual and reproductive healthcare specifically, since there is a lack of clear resources on this topic for youth. We recognize sexual and reproductive health as an important part of overall youth wellness and that is closely linked with other types of wellbeing, including mental, emotional, social, and physical health.

How to Use This Guide:

There is a lot of information included in this guide, we encourage you to use the Table of Contents on the next page to find the sections you need.

Clicking on any section title in the Table of Contents will take you directly to that section in the document.

A Note on Language:

In this document, we use “healthcare professional” to describe anyone within a clinical setting (like a health clinic, doctor’s office, or hospital) that are there to serve your health needs - this includes medical assistants, nurses, and certified technicians. The term “healthcare provider” or “provider” is used more specifically to describe people who provide direct medical care, such as nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and medical doctors or physicians. Other healthcare-related terms are described in different sections throughout this guide. For terminology that may be new, please see the [glossary](#).

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Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare Basics

Sexual health and reproductive care is important to your overall health. This portion of the guide will help you better understand what options are available and why they are helpful. We provide relevant information that is not shaming or stigmatizing to encourage you to make the best decisions for your own health.

What is preventive healthcare?

Preventive healthcare includes the steps people can take to detect or prevent disease, illness, and other health issues before they happen. This section will go over examples of routine preventative care, why it is important, and when to access these services.

Why is preventive care important for youth?

Preventive care practices - including regular medical check-ups, screenings, and vaccinations - are very important for young people! They can stop you from getting sick, or help you catch and treat health problems before they get worse. Good preventive healthcare helps you make sure your body and mind stays healthy, and it can help you avoid pain and more expensive medical treatments or procedures in the future.

When should you get preventive care?

Preventive care is important throughout your entire life - it's never too soon to start! **As a teenager or young adult, getting an annual (once-a-year) check-up, or “physical,” with a healthcare provider is the best form of preventive care.**

Your provider will be able to advise you on what preventive care is best for you personally. Additionally, your provider can refer you to other healthcare professionals that provide care related to your specific health goals and concerns.

Examples of Routine Preventive Care

General Check-Up Types

For overall health, there are different medical check-ups that are usually recommended for young people once a year. The names of these appointments vary based on where you go to access healthcare.

“Well-Child” Visits

These check-ups with your healthcare provider are recommended once a year from birth until you’re 18 years old. During these visits, there is a physical exam that takes place. Here are more details about what’s included in a well-child visit:

- The appointment usually begins with a conversation between the healthcare professional, the child patient, and their parent or guardian.
 - As the youth patient gets older, the visit can include a portion without the parent/guardian present, where you can ask questions or voice concerns to the healthcare professional.
- A healthcare professional will take the youth patient’s height and weight measurements and check blood pressure, and oxygen saturation levels.
 - All of these measurements are painless and quick.
- The healthcare provider will look over the youth patient for any abnormalities that may indicate a health concern. This may include things like the use of their hands to check for irregular circulation, fluid build up, or unusual heart rate.
- The healthcare provider will use a stethoscope to listen to the youth patient’s heart and lungs to make sure they sound as though they’re working correctly.

Annual Physicals

This term is used for annual check-ups for people over the age of 18, as “well-child” no longer applies. These appointments should happen once a year and are a time where you can talk to your provider about any concerns or questions you have about your health. They include a physical exam and may include additional tests or screenings at your provider’s recommendation, if you agree to them.

Sexual and Reproductive Health Check-Ups

In addition to general annual appointments, there are some kinds of preventive healthcare that specifically for your sexual and reproductive health - including yearly check-ups as well as screenings (tests to determine whether you have a medical condition or not) and vaccinations (shots that help your body learn to protect itself from certain illnesses, viruses, and bacteria). Depending on what body parts you have, some of these types of preventive care may not apply to you.

“Well-Woman” Visits

These visits are for individuals over the age of 18 who have vulvas, vaginas, uteruses, and/or ovaries to gain additional information and care about their sexual and reproductive health. (Note: while these appointments are called “well-woman” visits, some people who don’t identify as women but who have these body parts will still qualify and benefit from this type of care.) During these visits, you and your provider will often discuss things like menstruation (your period), breast growth, and sexual health screenings depending on your personal experiences. Additionally, when you are over the age of 21, this visit will be a place for you to receive a pelvic exam from a [gynecologist](#). Remember that this visit does NOT replace your annual physical.

Vaccinations

Starting from early childhood, people should receive routine vaccinations (in the form of a single shot or a “series” of multiple shots) that allow their bodies to develop resistance against harmful diseases before they come into contact with them. For sexual and reproductive health, youth are advised to receive the Hepatitis (Hep) A, Hep B, and HPV vaccine.

For other vaccine recommendations and information, visit the official Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at:

www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/hcp/imz/child-adolescent

Hepatitis A Vaccine

- This vaccine is a 2-dose series. It is recommended that the first shot, or dose, be given when a child is 12 months old and the second dose given within 6 months of the first dose.
- Why get the vaccine? Hepatitis A is a liver infection that can lead to death. Hepatitis A is easily spread by ingesting microscopic amounts through close contact of someone who has Hepatitis A. It is easily prevented by getting the vaccine. **(1)**

Hepatitis B Vaccine

- This vaccine is a 3-dose series. It is recommended that the first dose is given at birth, the second dose given at 1-2 months old, and the third dose is given at 6-18 months old.
- Why get the vaccine? Hepatitis B is a liver infection that can lead to liver failure and death. Hepatitis B is spread through contact with bodily fluids (like blood, semen or vaginal fluids). Transfer of bodily fluids can happen through sexual acts, needle sticks or sharing needles, or from birthing parent to child. It is easily prevented by getting the vaccine. **(2)**

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine

- This vaccine is a 2-dose series. It is recommended that the first dose is given at age 11 or 12 years old, and it can be given as early as 9 years old. The second dose is given 6-12 months after the first dose. NOTE: if the HPV vaccine is given to someone 15 years old or older, then 3 doses are required at 6-month intervals.
- Why get the vaccine? HPV can lead to six different types of cancer located in the cervix, vagina, vulva, penis, anus, and/or in the back of the throat including the base of the tongue and tonsils. The best way to prevent or lower the risk of developing the cancers associated with HPV is to get the vaccine. [\(3\)](#)

Screenings and Tests

Screenings and tests allow health concerns to be found early or prevented. People have higher risks of cancers based on things like family history or environmental exposure. If you know your family has a history of certain cancers you may want to start screenings earlier than the recommended age, talking with a trusted adult may help you understand if this applies to you.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) Testing

- This is recommended for sexually active people. If you are sexually active, it is recommended that you get tested before having sex with a new partner and to also get regularly tested every 6 months to 1 year. Routine STI testing allows for early detections and treatment of STIs. Providers can help explain what preventive measures are available to prevent STI transmission.
- STI testing can vary based on the type, most common forms of STI testing include blood draws, urine analysis, and swab testing. For more information on these please see the [glossary](#).

Birth Control Consultations

- Contraceptives, or birth control methods, are available for youth and can be prescribed by gynecologists and healthcare providers. There are many different types of contraceptives available, and a healthcare provider would be the most informed to help you figure out what kind works best for you and your sexual partner(s). Different types of contraception include the birth control pill, implanted devices, hormone shots, and condoms. Please note that most birth control options do NOT prevent sexually transmitted infections.

Pap Smears

- Pap smears are recommended for people with cervixes (the opening of the uterus), starting at 21 years old*. This is a screening for cervical cancer/abnormal cells and should happen every 1-3 years. While the process varies based on healthcare providers, it generally involves collecting cells from the cervix through the vaginal opening. **A pap smear may be recommended for people under the age of 21.*

Pelvic Exams

- These are used by healthcare professionals to assess the health of a vagina and vulva. Unlike a pap smear, this exam is used to screen for the entire health of the reproductive system. It is recommended to get a pelvic exam when you become sexually active, or at age 21.

Mammograms and Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) Test

- Generally these screenings are for older adults, however they are encouraged at younger ages for people with a family history of cancer. Mammograms are used to screen for breast cancers, and PSA is used to screen for prostate cancer.

The Healthcare System and Your Medical Rights

There's a lot that goes into getting healthcare that works for you: understanding how insurance works, how visits and treatment is paid for, your rights to privacy, and accessibility rights. This section will provide some general information that is good to know before you make or go to an appointment!

Understanding Health Insurance

What does it mean to be insured, and how can you make sure you are using your insurance status effectively? Read on for a basic overview. We've also included a flowchart later on that helps you think through your options for using or not using health insurance when seeking healthcare services.

How does health insurance affect the cost of services?

Health insurance is a program through which certain healthcare services such as doctors visits, surgery, procedures, prescription medications, and other necessary medical expenses are “covered” - meaning the insurance company will cover part or all of the cost of your healthcare services, so you don't have to pay extra “out of pocket.” People often get a health insurance plan through their employer or employer of a family member, and they pay a regular monthly cost for that insurance. Insurance is also available without an employer, and different plans can be found on HealthCare.gov. Many young people have some insurance coverage as part of their parent or guardian's health insurance plan.

By knowing and researching your or your parent/guardian's health insurance plan, you can learn where you are covered and where you might need to pay your medical bills out of pocket!

How does health insurance affect my privacy?

When someone with health insurance gets medical services, their doctor's office will usually send a bill to their health insurance company. The bill will have a description of the services provided so that the insurance company will pay for part or for all of that person's care, depending on the coverage plan. If you have your own insurance plan, then the bill and service description only goes to you. If you are covered under a parent or guardian's

plan, then the bill and service description will go to them, which means they will be informed about what services you received.

For many reasons, some young people may want to keep the information about what services they received private from their parent or guardian. This may not always be possible; in Michigan parent/guardian consent is required for some healthcare services for youth under 18 (you can find a list in the next section). However, there are options to maintain privacy for young people who do not have their own insurance plan or who are on their parent/guardian's insurance plan, including:

- Asking their healthcare provider not to bill insurance for services and paying the full bill themselves
- Visiting a free/low-cost clinic, such as a [Title X Clinic](#), which provides confidential services

Parent/Guardian Consent Requirements

In Michigan, minors (youth under 18) are required to get parent/guardian permission in order to receive certain sexual and reproductive healthcare services.

Please note that the chart on [page 15](#) only looks at whether minors need permission for different services. These services may not be kept confidential on insurance or billing forms.

Chart: Parent/Guardian Consent Chart for Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare Services

If you are under 18, the following chart explains which sexual and reproductive healthcare services you are or are not required to get parent/guardian permission for:

HEALTHCARE SERVICE:	CAN I GET THIS SERVICE <u>WITHOUT</u> PARENT/GUARDIAN PERMISSION?
Vaccines (including the HPV vaccine)	NO, consent needed
Testing and Treatment for STIs	YES
Birth Control/Contraceptives	YES
Pregnancy Testing	YES
Prenatal Care	YES
Healthcare for your own child	YES
Abortion (medication or surgical)	NO*, consent needed
Adoption	NO**, consent needed
Emergency Contraceptive Pills	YES***
Gender Affirming Hormone Therapy	NO, consent needed
Gender Affirming Surgeries	NO, consent needed

* Michigan has a legal process called a **“judicial bypass”** or **“judicial waiver”** that would allow a pregnant person under 18 to obtain an abortion without parent/guardian consent.

** Adoption requires parent/guardian consent unless a newborn (under 3 days old) is safely and legally surrendered to an emergency services provider at a hospital, fire department, or police station. Learn more at: michigan.gov/safedelivery

*** Most emergency contraceptive pills are available over-the-counter with no prescription needed (except for the “ella” pill).

Title X Clinics: Youth-Friendly Sexual and Reproductive Health Services

If you are looking for free or low-cost sexual and reproductive health services, or if confidentiality (keeping information about what services you receive private) is particularly important to you, it's good to know about Title X clinics! These are special types of healthcare providers that can help youth under 18 and uninsured young people get the care they need in a way that is comfortable for them.

What is Title X?

Title X is a federal family planning program established by the US congress in 1970. It provides funding to certain clinics across the country, which are then labeled Title X clinics. The Title X funding that the clinics use allows patients to receive family planning and reproductive healthcare for little to no cost and has enforced privacy protection for [minors](#).

To find your nearest Title X clinic in MI, click [here](#)!

Details About Title X Cost and Service Coverage

Wondering what “free or low-cost” means, and what kinds of healthcare services Title X clinics will provide? Read on!

How is the cost for services determined?

Services at Title X clinics use a “sliding scale” to determine the cost of services based on your income level (or how much money you make). Sliding scale payment methods generally mean those who make less, pay less. This means that people may be able to access services at low or no cost, and no one will be refused treatment because they cannot afford it.

What kinds of sexual and reproductive health services do Title X clinics offer?

Funding from the Title X program provides individuals with comprehensive family planning and preventative health services. Title X clinics can provide the following services:

- Birth control/contraception
- STI testing and treatment
- Wellness exams
- Health screenings (like breast and cervical cancer screenings)
- Pregnancy testing
- Pregnancy consultation
- Some Vaccinations/Immunizations

In 2019, there was a Title X gag rule implemented that prevents medical professionals from being able to inform patients of where and how they can safely and legally access abortion options. This means that Title X clinics can only provide pregnant individuals information about some of their pregnancy options, including:

- Prenatal care and delivery/birth
- Infant care
- Foster care
- Adoption

Please Note: Title X funding does **NOT** cover abortion services or pregnancy care (obstetric and prenatal care). Since 2019, providers under Title X funding cannot give any information around abortion.

Planned Parenthood withdrew from their Title X status in 2019 when the gag rule was implemented; this means that they are still a safe confidential provider who offers a sliding scale payment option, and they can provide information about abortion services. For more information about Planned Parenthood and Title X, click [here](#).

The best way to know whether a clinic can or will meet your health needs is to call and ask the service providers who work there.

Your Rights to Privacy

As a healthcare patient, you are entitled to privacy and confidentiality. Even under the age of 18, providers have to respect your confidentiality.

Understanding confidentiality laws and how they help you is important as you prepare to go to a healthcare appointment.

What is confidential?

If something is confidential, it means that information is private and will only be shared with certain people you give permission to. Your name and identity is still connected to confidential information, but it is protected. Confidential does not mean [anonymous](#).

Ask your provider if the information you are sharing will be kept confidential, and how they [disclose](#) information.

What is HIPAA?

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) is a federal statute through which your healthcare information cannot be disclosed without your consent or knowledge. Your privacy is protected by federal law. This means that YOU have control of how your personal medical information is used and who has access to it.

HIPAA ensures that you have access to your medical records. This is covered in more detail [here](#).

For minors (youth under 18), there is a chance that information otherwise protected by HIPAA may be shared with parents/guardians. Read below for more details.

What healthcare information is protected by HIPAA?

- Any information written in your medical records by a healthcare professional or provider
- Any conversations you have with your healthcare provider [in confidence](#)
- All personal information within health insurance systems
- Any billing information your clinic has
- Most health information stored in any clinic or hospital required to follow HIPAA privacy laws

Please note: If you are unsure whether a conversation or certain information is covered by HIPAA, ask your provider! You have the right to know what information you may share will stay confidential. More information can be found [here](#).

Who does or doesn't have to follow HIPAA privacy rules?

The following people and organizations **MUST** follow HIPAA privacy rules:

- Your healthcare providers
- Health plans from insurance providers
 - Some examples include: Health, dental, vision and prescription drug insurers, health maintenance organizations (HMOs), Medicare, Medicaid, and Medicare+Choice
- Healthcare clearinghouses
 - These are organizations who send information from healthcare providers to insurance companies

The following people and organizations **DO NOT** follow HIPAA privacy rules:

- Life insurers
- Employers
- Workers compensation carriers
- Schools and school districts
- Many state agencies (for example: Child Protective Service agencies)
- Law enforcement agencies and many municipal offices

For more information about the HIPAA privacy rule, visit the [CDC website](#).

Breaking HIPAA Confidentiality

There are some situations where someone who is required to follow the HIPAA privacy rule is legally required to break that confidentiality and share your personal protected health information in order to keep you safe.

For minors, there is an expectation of privacy that providers will maintain confidentiality even for parents/guardians. However, it is not legally enforced.

Healthcare providers will break confidentiality and report to the proper agencies if:

- There is suspicion of abuse by an adult
- The minor is a risk to themselves or someone else (for example: they say that they are going to harm themselves or someone else)
- The minor is under age 12 and has been sexually active

Additionally, a healthcare provider may choose, but is not required, to tell the parent/guardian about any care provided to a minor patient for a “compelling medical reason.”

If a provider has to break your confidentiality, they are required to tell you in advance. Because HIPAA has confusing language in regard to minor confidentiality, providers may notify a parent/guardian without telling you.

Prior to breaking confidentiality, healthcare providers should:

- Inform you about the circumstances in which they will have to break confidence
- Involve your parents/guardians if it is a life-threatening or harmful situation
- Assess that parental/guardian involvement will not be detrimental to your well-being

Asking your provider about what will remain confidential is the best way to protect your own privacy and confidentiality.

Your privacy and confidentiality is important. Your provider should be willing and able to discuss your specific privacy or confidentiality needs so that they can best serve you.

Your Privacy Rights for Health Information

You have the right to access your official records.

- You have the right to access all of your medical records or health information, and you should receive it within 30 days of request.

You have the right to make any corrections to your official records.

- If any information is incorrectly displayed, you have the right to dispute it. If approved by the health system it must be officially corrected.

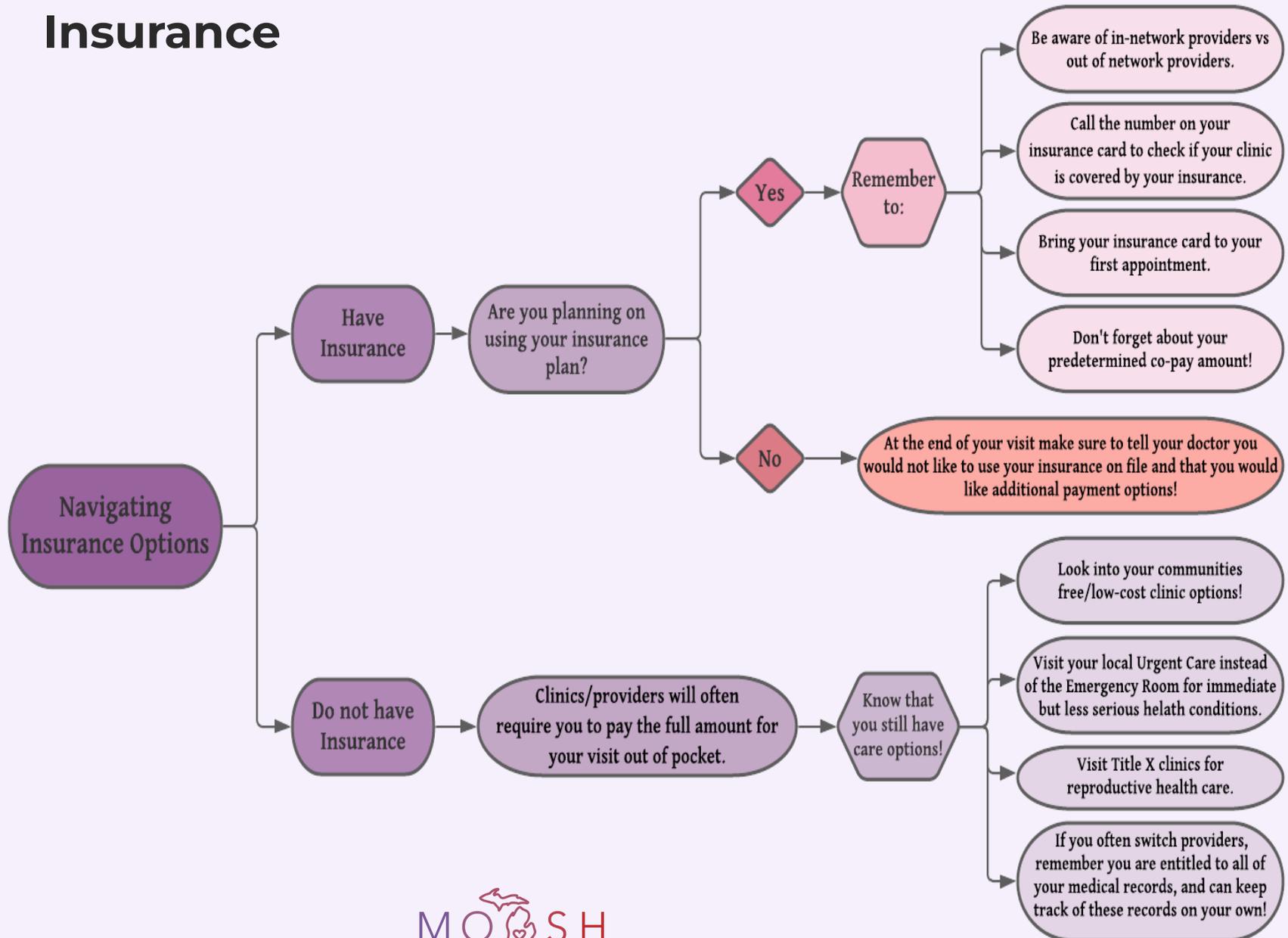
You have the right to know who has seen your medical records.

- Information may be shared for mandatory health reports, national research, or other related reasons. You have the right to know who has seen your information and where it was sent.
- **You can tell your provider and/or insurance company that you do not want any specific information shared with anyone**, including other doctors and/or nurses.

You have the right to make reasonable requests to ensure your privacy.

- This means that if you would like to be contacted somewhere other than your home or receive discreet mailed information you can request that. For example, if you request a copy of your medical records you can ask they be mailed in an unlabeled plain envelope that does not clearly mark these are from a clinic or medical office.

Flowchart: Navigating Care With and Without Insurance



Accessibility as a Medical Right

Healthcare organizations and medical offices cannot discriminate against people with disabilities. All medical providers and buildings have to follow the guidelines set by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

What is the ADA?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal civil rights law created to ensure full and equal access for people with disabilities in all public services including healthcare. Medical spaces and healthcare providers must be:

- **Physically accessible**
 - Some examples include ramps, elevators, automatic doors, adjustable exam tables, bathrooms that are big enough to accommodate wheelchair and other mobility aid users
- **Communicate effectively**
 - Some examples include providing certified medical interpreters, offering different modes of explanation like visual aids, rewording medical terminology into easier to understand ways
- **Offer reasonable modifications of policies, practices, and procedures**
 - Some examples include allowing caregivers to accompany patients to radiology scans, assisting patients with filling out paperwork, allowing service dogs to be present in exam rooms

Visit [here](#) for more information.

You can call your healthcare professional's office and ask about how their office space is set up and how they comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Having accessible healthcare allows for you to make the most informed decisions for your health which allows you to have the most medical autonomy.

Seeing a Healthcare Provider

This section will provide information about how to find the right provider for you and your health needs, how to make an appointment, going to appointments, and how to effectively communicate with your provider at that appointment.

To learn about the different types of medical providers, see [Types of Healthcare Professionals](#).

Finding the Right Healthcare Professional for You

Finding a doctor that you feel comfortable with, who cares about you, and has the expertise for your healthcare needs is so important for meeting your healthcare needs.

Sometimes finding a doctor for the first time can feel daunting. There are many different ways to go about this, some options include:

- Do **online research** for doctors in your area! There is so much information on the internet, and many insurance companies provide search engines for [PCPs](#) or other physicians.
- Information online can be overwhelming - in this case, **referrals and reviews** can help. If you already have a doctor you like and trust, ask them who else they'd suggest for your care.
- If you don't have a doctor you like and trust, reach out to friends, coworkers, or family members who may share some of your identities, medical needs, and/or values about healthcare. See if they can give you **a recommendation** for a doctor they like and trust.
- If you do not have access to a personal recommendation, another great way to select a doctor is through **patient reviews**. These can often be found online and will let you know how other patients feel about the quality of care they received.
- If you are worried about visiting a doctor without a recommendation or referral, try looking into doctors that work in **reputable hospital systems**. These doctors are often heavily vetted and are held to high standards of patient care.

Sometimes, a doctor can be the wrong type or the wrong fit. Being the wrong type of provider means they do not treat the problem or condition you need care for. Being the wrong fit is more about your compatibility and their ability

to be a good provider for you personally. For example, some doctors may communicate in ways that are less effective for you as a patient and it is worth finding a different provider.

Your doctor should not judge you or react negatively to your identity, ability status, questions, or concerns you may have. You should feel respected and listened to. If you are not being treated properly, you can leave the appointment and seek treatment elsewhere.

Remember, you are in control of where you choose to be and you can leave a provider at any time for any reason.

A healthcare professional should respect you and your identity at all times. They should listen to and address your concerns in a respectful and appropriate way. If you do not feel that your healthcare provider is doing ALL of these things, request a new healthcare provider. You can ask them, or someone else in the office, for a referral. You can also ask your parent/guardian, or another trusted adult to help you find a new healthcare provider.

Establishing Trust with Your Healthcare Professional

It is essential that you find a healthcare provider that is **inclusive and accepting** of you! Trust between you and your provider is important, it allows you to receive information and medical care specific to your needs.

Here are some questions to ask yourself about your healthcare professional:

- **Are they affirming?**
 - Do they provide you with emotional support in a comfortable way?
 - Do they listen to what you have to say?

- **Are they inclusive?**
 - Do they ask for your pronouns, and use them?
 - Do they avoid making assumptions about your gender, sexual orientation, relationships, etc.?
 - Do they provide accurate information that does not make you feel uncomfortable based on race, body size, ability status, or gender?

- **Do they explain what is happening in your appointment and why?**
 - Do they explain what they are doing before they do it?
 - Do they ask for your permission to perform medical exams and tests?

- **Do they make information accessible to you?**
 - Do they break complex medical terminology down into understandable words?
 - Do they break down medical conditions into simpler examples and analogies or metaphors?
 - Do they answer your questions?
 - Do they validate your concerns?
 - Some healthcare professionals may use diagrams, drawings, or other methods to increase understanding

- **Do they clearly communicate your healthcare rights?**
 - Do they inform you about confidential services?
 - Do they ensure your privacy is separate from your parent/guardian when needed or wanted?
 - Do they explain what forms and documents you are required to sign?
 - Do they listen to what you need?
 - Do they inform you of your financial options?

Preparing for an Appointment

This section provides answers to many frequently asked questions when trying to go to a healthcare appointment, like what you need to bring, how billing and payment works, and addressing concerns about clinic hours, safety procedures, and telehealth/virtual visits.

What do you need to bring?

Make sure to bring a valid photo ID (such as a driver's license or school ID), your insurance card (if applicable), and a method of payment to your appointment. It can also be helpful to write down and bring any questions you have for your provider to the appointment, so you don't forget to ask!

How does the billing process work?

With or without insurance, there are usually two ways you can pay your healthcare bill.

- You can receive your bill and pay at the time of the appointment using cash, check or credit card.
- You can have the bill sent to you to pay at a later date. These bills usually have a due date of 30 days after the appointment date. Some places offer "sliding scale" payment options or payment plans that extend this 30 day period.

COVID-19 Considerations for Hours and Safety Procedures

Before you make an appointment, be sure to check your medical provider's hours and understand what safety procedures are in place. You can find this information online or by calling their office.

Consider that clinic hours may have shifted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Be sure to check your provider's website or call the office to confirm their

office's hours they are open, and whether the appointment will be in-person or virtual.

Navigating Telehealth and Virtual Options

With the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become more difficult for people to have appointments in-person to see their providers. Many providers offer telehealth services or virtual video call options for appointments. To find out if your healthcare professional offers virtual visits check their website, online portal, or give their office a call. The availability of these appointments may change.

Telehealth/Virtual Visit are video call appointments done on a [HIPAA compliant](#) platform. When you schedule an appointment through the office they will confirm whether an appointment is in person or virtual. Before your appointment a nurse may call you to verify your information and to explain how you will receive the link to your virtual appointment. It is common to receive a link through email or text at the time of your appointment.

Transportation Options

Transportation is how you get to and from an in person appointment. It is a fundamental part of being able to visit your healthcare professional. Before selecting a healthcare provider, **be sure to create a plan about how you will get to and from your appointment.**

Some methods you could try include asking for a ride from a friend, family member, or trusted adult. You can call the office to learn more information about what parking and transportation options are available. Alternative options include taking a local bus, or using a rideshare service like Uber or Lyft.

If transportation is a concern for you, there may be options for telehealth and/or virtual health visits available.

Making an Appointment

Once you feel comfortable and prepared, it is time to make an appointment! The process of making an appointment with your healthcare provider can be found below.

How to Make an Appointment

As a new or potential patient, the best way to check availability and make an appointment is by calling the office. When you call a provider's office there is often a receptionist who will answer your call and help you schedule appointments.

- First, ask the office if the provider you want to see has any availability and is taking new patients (if you haven't had an appointment with them before).
- They may ask you for more information about yourself and what you are scheduling an appointment for.
- You may ask the staff whether the provider you are planning to see is a good match for the qualities you are looking for.
- Many people under 18 are accompanied by a parent/guardian. If you are comfortable with this you can express to your doctor you'd like them to stay for the appointment.
- If you are under 18 and do not wish for a parent/guardian to accompany you to the appointment:
 - You may ask the provider if you are able to go without your parent/guardian, or what their office does to ensure you have time alone with a provider to ask questions about your health.

Once you have found a provider, many health systems will give you the option to join a healthcare portal. A [HIPAA compliant](#) application or website is where you can direct-message your medical providers, request prescription refills, check test results, make and confirm appointments, set up payment options, and receive non-urgent communications.

Communicating with Your Provider

Building a relationship with your healthcare provider is similar to any other relationship you develop. In healthcare, there is an extra layer of trust, support, and affirmation that makes communication more effective. For example, if your provider dismisses you or doesn't listen, it can be hard to get the care you need.

How to Talk with Your Provider

Navigating healthcare can be difficult! Sometimes it's confusing to know how you are expected to interact in medical settings and what your role as a patient is. Below are some strategies to feel empowered, comfortable, and confident when speaking with your healthcare provider and other healthcare professionals.

- **Tell your healthcare provider how you would like to be addressed by sharing your name and pronouns.**
- **Ask questions!** Asking questions and being engaged in your healthcare helps you understand your own health. When talking to your provider, feel free to ask any questions you have. You can prepare them before the appointment, or just ask when you think of one during the appointment.
 - It may help to create a list of questions or topics you want to address with your provider prior to the appointment.
 - Your questions can be about anything! Asking questions helps you build a relationship with the healthcare professional and maintain comfort in your healthcare setting. After you ask the first question, your next one will be easier!
- **Be honest and open with your healthcare provider.** It is the best way to access the support and resources you need. This, in part, is why finding the right provider for you is so important. You have the right to discuss your concerns and/or symptoms openly.

Remember, your provider's job is to support YOU and your health needs!

Communicating with Your Parent/Guardian About Your Healthcare

Parent/guardian relationships and provider relationships can be difficult to navigate, and they may have some overlap. In this section, we will discuss how to talk to your parent/guardian about your health and medical care, especially for youth under 18 years old.

Strategies for Effective Communication

To start, **express an interest in becoming responsible for your medical needs**. Some examples include: asking questions about health insurance, scheduling health-related appointments, obtaining your family medical history, and/or discussing topics you would like to bring up to your healthcare professional with your parent/guardian.

Initiate a conversation with your parent/guardian about what they think the best course of action is for your health. When you have this conversation, consider the questions below:

- How does their opinion align or differ from yours?
- If you and your parent/guardian have different opinions of your health and healthcare, how can you both reach a compromise?
- Ask them how they feel about the healthcare you are receiving. Are they satisfied? Do their feelings about your healthcare match yours?
 - If one or both of you are not satisfied, try to brainstorm ways you can improve the healthcare you are receiving together.

When having these conversations, it is important to approach the discussion with the intent of constructive sharing and problem-solving. It is okay if this style of communication is new to you and your parent/guardian. It can take

some time and practice to feel comfortable with it. There may be some differences of opinion or debate. If the discussion starts to become more argumentative or tense, try taking a pause or redirecting the conversation.

Setting Boundaries with Your Parent/Guardian

You are entitled to your privacy in medical and healthcare settings and many healthcare providers maintain confidentiality at their own [discretion](#). But how do you tell your guardian that you would like to talk to the healthcare professional alone? Or tell your guardian that you want to be involved in making decisions for your healthcare?

If you are accompanied by a parent/guardian during your appointment, your provider should request to speak with you privately for a few minutes.

- At this time, you can ask about what topics your doctor is able to keep confidential between you and them. Afterwards, you may ask any other questions you have.
- If your provider does not create an opportunity for you to talk in private, you may initiate this yourself.
 - For example, you could ask, “Could I have a couple of minutes to talk with the doctor alone?” or “Would it be possible for us to go over some of this information again privately?”
 - Even if your guardian is uncomfortable with this or pushes against this, your medical provider should take the initiative from here to ensure you have some time to speak confidentially.

Handling Parent/Guardian Concerns About Your Medical Autonomy

It can be difficult for some parents/guardians to let go and allow their teenage children to be responsible for their own healthcare.

Here are some conversation topics that support youth having a voice in their own healthcare decisions!

- When you turn 18 and become an adult, it can feel like adulthood happens overnight. However, responsibility does not come so easily. It is important to learn about your own healthcare, prescriptions, and/or insurance so that you are prepared when your parents/guardians no longer make these decisions.
- Many college-aged students are unaware of how to obtain medical services such as physicals, checkups, preventive care, mental health services, or dental care. This can be a concern because health issues often become worse when they are not monitored or managed with regular care.
- If you are able to have these informative conversations with your providers about your own health, it may be easier to understand any future recommendations a provider gives you. Often, medical systems become easier to navigate with more experience.
- Being more involved in healthcare decisions allows youth voices to be heard and helps healthcare become a less frustrating, confusing, and intimidating process.
- Some youth feel uncomfortable or anxious about receiving medical care. By taking steps to familiarize yourself with your health and healthcare, you can make accessing healthcare easier and less anxiety-inducing.

Remember it is your body, your health, and your life! Being aware of and knowing your own emotional and physical health, prescriptions, and diagnoses from your doctors can make a huge difference in your lifelong health practices.

Glossary

A

Accessible means there are no barriers to access in a space or interaction. This means that there are no structural, format, language, technological, or systemic barriers keeping people from easily engaging.

Anonymous means that your name and information are not recorded together.

B

Birth Control or Contraception is any method or medical device used to prevent pregnancy.

Blood Draws are a type of test when blood is drawn from a patient and it is sent to a lab to be tested for a specific concern or to screen generally for wide health markers.

C

Confidentiality means that the information is private and will only be shared with certain people you give permission to.

In Confidence is a specific phrase that must be used which means a conversation will be confidential.

Consent is an agreement that something specific is okay and allowed.

D

Disclosure means to tell someone information. For example: a patient can disclose information to their provider.

(Provider) Discretion means that a healthcare professional can choose whether to give or withhold information to parents/guardians.

H

Health Insurance is a program through which certain healthcare services such as doctors visits, surgery, procedures, prescription medications, and other necessary medical expenses are partially or entirely paid for by insurance companies.

M

Medical Autonomy is the right of individuals to make informed decisions about their own medical care for themselves.

Minor refers to anyone 17 years old or younger.

R

A **Referral** is when your provider formally connects you with another healthcare professional.

S

Screenings are tests to determine whether you have a medical condition or not

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are infections (caused by bacteria, viruses, or parasites) that can be transmitted through sexual contact.

Swab Testing is when a swab - a specific tool that usually looks like a large Q tip - is used to take a sample from someone. For example: swab testing is how most PCR COVID-19 tests are done, a swab is put up the nostril to collect a sample that can be sent to a lab and tested.

U

Urine Analysis is a test where the patient pees, or urinates, into a plastic cup. It is then labeled and sent to a lab for testing. This is a common way to test for urinary tract infections (UTIs), sexually transmitted infections (STIs), yeast infections, and more.

V

Vaccinations are shots that help your body learn to protect itself from certain illnesses, viruses, and bacteria. Some older documents use the term “immunization” interchangeably with vaccination.

Types of Healthcare Professionals

Many types of doctors have special names and it can be hard to figure out what doctor to make an appointment with based on your health needs. The professionals listed below are the most common to interact with for sexual and reproductive healthcare needs.

Physician or Doctor: a medical professional who has completed medical school and is qualified to practice medicine and prescribe medication. They can have a Medical Degree (MD) or Doctorate of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) degree.

Gynecologist: a doctor that is trained to focus on conditions and health needs related to the vulvas, vaginas, uteruses, and/or ovaries. They do sexual and reproductive healthcare that is not related to pregnancy itself, and they are often confused with obstetricians. This is the doctor that most commonly does pap smears, inserts/removes IUD contraceptives, and can offer management options for conditions like endometriosis or PCOS.

Obstetricians: a doctor that specializes in pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum period. They have more advanced training than Gynecologists and can deliver babies.

Endocrinologist: a doctor who specializes in hormones and is an expert in diagnosing and treating endocrine conditions. This doctor is often the one who oversees gender-affirming hormone replacement therapy for transgender patients.

Nurse Practitioner: a registered nurse who has advanced education and clinical training. They can prescribe medications, however in Michigan they are restricted and must work under the supervision of a physician.

Physician Assistant: a medical professional who is trained the same way physicians are. They are able to see patients of all ages, in various specialties, and can prescribe medication. In Michigan they do not require a physician supervisor but must work with a participating physician.

Registered Nurse: a medical professional who treats patients and provides educational and emotional support.

Medical Assistant: a medical professional who helps doctors in clinics and hospitals. They collect information and prepare both the patient and the doctor for the visit. They cannot offer medical advice as they are not licensed or certified.

Therapist or Counselor: a mental health professional who may diagnose mental health concerns and assist by offering coping skills, support, and guidance. They may hold a Master's Degree in Social Work or Counseling and are generally licensed.

Psychiatrist: a medical doctor who specializes in treating mental health conditions. They are able to prescribe medication.

Types of Primary Care Providers (PCPs)

Primary Care Provider: the provider you go to for your basic healthcare needs. Generally, they perform the annual physical exam and are who you go to when you have a concern. Primary care providers (PCPs) may refer you to specialists. Below are common types of PCPs:

- **Family Practice:** PCPs who are able to treat patients of all ages, from newborns to the elderly. They are generalists who can treat a wide variety of conditions, and often can also treat conditions you'd normally see a specialist for, like sports injuries or some women's health needs. Often they have a broader scope of training than general physicians.
- **General Practice:** PCPs, like family practice physicians, who can treat patients of any gender or age.
- **Internal Medicine:** PCPs who typically treat adults and specialize in the prevention, diagnosis, and management of disease and chronic conditions.
- **Pediatric Practice:** PCPs, also known as pediatricians, who manage the physical, behavioral, and mental care for children from birth until age 18. A pediatrician is trained to diagnose and treat a broad range of childhood illnesses, from minor health problems to serious diseases.