

# HOW DO I speak up for my and my family's health?

According to the *Listening to Black Californians* study, more than 1 in 4 Black Californians avoid health care due to concerns that they will be treated unfairly or with disrespect. Here are ways you can take control of your health care.

**You too can take action for your health!**



## Clearly communicate with your providers

Health care providers can include primary care doctors, nurses, social workers, and more.

Some Black patients say they minimize their symptoms and questions to avoid being seen as difficult at their visits. As patients, it can be hard to speak up. But if we don't, we don't get the care we need and deserve.

Here are some ways to communicate clearly with your provider:

**Prepare for your visit:** Read our “How do I prepare for my health visits?” fact sheet.

- **Speak up:**
  - Be assertive but respectful – if you ever feel your provider is dismissing important issues, use “I” statements. For example, say “I disagree” instead of “You’re wrong.”
  - Don’t minimize your symptoms or situation – if something feels important, it is.
- **Do your own health research before and after a visit:** Read about your symptoms, treatment options, or tests online from trusted sources such as [mayoclinic.org](http://mayoclinic.org) or [medlineplus.gov](http://medlineplus.gov). This can help you have an informed discussion around your questions and the terms your provider may use

## Know your rights as a patient

Everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, or other characteristics, has rights as a patient that are protected by law. Your rights include being able to:

- **Get a second opinion** about a diagnosis or treatment from another provider.
- **File a complaint.** If you feel mistreated or disrespected, chances are you’re not alone. It’s up to all of us to hold our providers accountable. Filing a complaint helps establish a record of misconduct.
- **Choose your own provider.** A good provider treats you with respect, doesn’t rush you, and makes eye contact. It’s your choice to switch providers when it’s not a good fit.
- **Access your medical records.** Did you know you can add your own notes to your medical records? You have the power to set the record straight. If your provider denies a test or treatment that you asked for, make sure that goes in your record. It’s your health and your medical record—remember that.
- **Keep your medical information private.** Your medical information is just that—yours. You can set limits on who sees your information, and on when and how your providers contact you.

See a full list of your rights in California at [www.dmhc.ca.gov/HealthCareinCalifornia/YourHealthCareRights.aspx](http://www.dmhc.ca.gov/HealthCareinCalifornia/YourHealthCareRights.aspx)

## File a complaint if something goes wrong

Some Black Californians say their privacy was not respected or they were harmed during a health care visit. If this ever happens, **it’s your right to file a complaint. Providers need to be held accountable for their actions.** Sharing your complaints can prevent this in the future.

You can file a complaint with your state's medical board if your provider has:

- Failed to give you proper care
- Failed to diagnose you with a medical problem that is found later
- Prescribed you wrong medicines
- Acted in an unprofessional way

In California, you can file a complaint about a provider at [www.mbc.ca.gov/Consumers/file-a-complaint](http://www.mbc.ca.gov/Consumers/file-a-complaint)

If your health plan denies, changes, or delays coverage for medical services that you think should be covered, you can:

1. File a complaint with your health plan first. Learn how to file a complaint at [www.dmhc.ca.gov/File-a-Complaint/Contact-Your-Health-Plan.aspx](http://www.dmhc.ca.gov/File-a-Complaint/Contact-Your-Health-Plan.aspx)
2. Then you can apply for an Independent Medical Review (IMR). An IMR is when a medical professional reviews a decision of your health insurance company. The Department of Managed Health Care Help Center can help with an IMR at [www.dmhc.ca.gov/FileaComplaint.aspx](http://www.dmhc.ca.gov/FileaComplaint.aspx)

## Talk to a patient advocate

Patient advocates, also called patient navigators or liaisons, are people who can help you use the health care system. They can help you:

- Set up appointments and talk with your providers
- Understand provider instructions and test results
- Understand your health plan
- Get financial help
- File complaints about your care and more

There are different types of patient advocates:

- Advocates hired by hospitals, health care facilities, or insurance companies to help patients within that facility or company – this is usually free.
- Private advocates with their own businesses who offer one-on-one help to patients at different facilities – this is usually not covered by insurance, and costs money.

To get help from a patient advocate:

- In a hospital or health care facility, ask patient services if they have advocates that can help you while you are there.
- Ask your health plan if they can offer a case manager to help you with insurance issues.
- Visit these sites to help you look for a private advocate:
  - The National Association of Healthcare Advocacy (NAHAC) directory at [nahac.com/directory-of-advocates#!directory](http://nahac.com/directory-of-advocates#!directory)
  - The AdvoConnection directory at [profile.advoconnection.com](http://profile.advoconnection.com)
  - The Patient Advocate Foundation offers free support to patients and families living with a serious or chronic health condition. Visit them at [www.patientadvocate.org](http://www.patientadvocate.org)

You can learn more about the *Listening to Black Californians* study at [www.chcf.org/program/listening-to-black-californians](http://www.chcf.org/program/listening-to-black-californians)

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