



Access to Services: What Group Health members need to know about accessing reproductive or end-of-life services



To make sure our members have access to a full range of services, Group Health contracts with a broad network of health care providers. Some of our members have raised questions about access to reproductive and end-of-life services while receiving care at any religiously affiliated hospital that we contract with. In most cases, services such as abortion, birth control, sterilization and physician-assisted suicide are not typically delivered in a hospital setting; we work to ensure these services are available in other settings.

We hope the answers below will address any questions you may have about your access to health care services.

Reproductive health services

Most reproductive health services are provided in outpatient clinics, such as a Group Health Medical Center or in a network provider clinic in your community. In most situations it is not necessary to go to a hospital for these services.

Will I have any problems getting a prescription for birth control?

Usually a member of your health care team, at either your Group Health Medical Center or at a provider in our network, will prescribe birth control, including pills, diaphragms, and IUDs. Your provider will make sure you understand all of your options and the benefits or side effects of each option.

What surgical options will I have for preventing a pregnancy?

Tubal ligation

Tubal ligation can be done at either an outpatient surgery center or in a hospital, depending on your needs. If, after talking with your provider, you decide to have a tubal ligation, your provider will recommend the best place for you to have this procedure.

Sometimes a woman will have a tubal ligation in the hospital after giving birth. If this is something you decide to have done, your doctor will coordinate your care with the hospital. If this is something you request while you are already at the hospital, your doctor will coordinate your care in the hospital. If the service is not available at the hospital where you are receiving care or is postponed due to complications, the procedure will be performed during a second visit in an outpatient surgery center.

Vasectomy

A vasectomy can be done at either a Group Health Medical Center or at a clinic in our network of providers. Your health care team will oversee this process and all follow-up care.

What if I want or need to end a pregnancy?

Women can choose to end a pregnancy either by getting surgery or by taking medicine. The earlier you are in your pregnancy, the more options and fewer health complications you're likely to have. Most women who choose to end a pregnancy don't need to go to a hospital, unless there is an emergency. In most cases, a woman can end a pregnancy at an outpatient clinic.

In the case of an emergency, you might need to go to a hospital emergency room. If this happens, the doctors on call will use their best medical judgment to make sure you get the care you need. If ending the pregnancy is the best option because your life is at risk, your doctor will work with you to make sure your health care needs are met.

Will I be able to have in vitro fertilization to become pregnant?

If in vitro fertilization is covered by your health plan, we will provide this service at either a Group Health Medical Center or at one of the clinics in our network of providers.

End-of-life services

It can be hard to talk with your loved ones about death. But it is important to discuss your choices while you can speak for yourself. Planning ahead will help you and your loved ones make hard decisions when the time comes.

We encourage you to talk with your family and your doctor about the type of care you want to receive if you have a terminal illness or serious injury. This may be one of the greatest gifts you can give your family.

How can I prepare advance directives documents if I don't have them already?

Group Health's "Your Life, Your Choices" program offers free classes to help you prepare these documents and discuss them with your loved ones. You can learn more about this program and download end-of-life documents on our Group Health website at ghc.org.

If I have advance directives documents, will they be honored by all contracted hospitals?

All of our contracted hospital partners, including those with religious affiliations, encourage and support the use of advance directives. Advance directives can include a Health Care Directive (living will), Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care and Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST).

However, if you request physician-assisted suicide or life-ending lethal medication either verbally or in your advance directive or POLST, it is possible that request might not be carried out in a hospital setting. In that case, your doctor, the hospital staff, and Group Health's care management team will coordinate your transfer to a different location. This could be your home or other inpatient setting where your request can be honored. In the past, Group Health has worked with patients and their families to make sure that their end-of-life choices were honored.

Your rights as a Group Health patient

No matter where you receive your care, Group Health and all our community network partners support and respect the confidentiality of the doctor-patient relationship.

Nothing can take the place of conversations between patients and their providers. We encourage all of our members to learn about their rights and options, and to have regular, open conversations with their doctor about their health care preferences. To learn more, you can find Group Health Members Rights and Responsibilities [here](#).

Questions?

If I have questions about reproductive or end-of-life services, who should I ask?

A conversation with your provider is the best place to discuss these sensitive issues. Group Health and all our community network partners support and respect the confidentiality of the doctor-patient relationship. We encourage you to have regular and open conversations with your doctor about your health care preferences, and encourage you to learn more about your rights as a Group Health patient [here](#).

If my physician does not provide these services, what are my next steps?

In instances where your Group Health provider does not offer a specific reproductive or end-of-life service, they will refer you to a provider who does. If you have additional questions regarding this matter, you may call Group Health Customer Service toll-free at 1-888-901-4636 Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.