

AB 236 (Holden)

The Problem with Health Plan Provider Directories
Stories from Californians



California health plan’s are required to maintain an updated directory of in-network health care providers for their enrollees. Consumers must be able to rely on these directories for accurate information in order to find providers, but often are stymied by a large percent of outdated, missing, and unavailable listings.

AB 236 (Holden) establishes mechanisms to improve provider directory accuracy for consumers so that they can find the care they need.

Lynn A. _____
Ventura, CA

Lynn needed a painful spot on her back examined, but the nearest dermatologist in her health plan’s provider directory wasn’t taking new patients. It took a month to get an appointment, and 4 months after she started feeling pain, she finally had surgery to remove what turned out to be a basal cell carcinoma. This wasn’t Lynn’s only struggle to find care; she faced similar issues in finding a dentist and chiropractor.

“Lynn called 12 different dentists that were listed in the Wellcare directory, but unfortunately almost half of them were no longer practicing in her area.”

Carly _____
Berkeley, CA

While facing a crisis in 2018, Carly called 100 providers listed on her health plan’s directory, and all of them turned out to be out-of-network, not accepting new patients, or didn’t return her calls. Even after asking her plan for help and filing an appeal, she was just sent the outdated directory link again.

“The extreme time and effort it takes to sort through outdated directories and find a provider, can exacerbate the very health condition the beneficiary is seeking services to address.”

Susan F. _____
Santa Ana, CA

For years, Susan F.’s health plan has been sending her inaccurate lists of providers. When she complained to a health plan representative, they told her to send them a list of the unavailable providers she tried. The burden of directory maintenance has been placed on her, rather than the health plans they are paying premiums for.

“When you tell a Blue Shield representative about it, they say, ‘well, call us back with the list that you have of doctors that are not calling you back or not taking new clients or are no longer in the network and let us know.’ Why do we have to do the leg work?”



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Staci O. _____
Los Angeles, CA

Staci O. has spent hours trying to find an in-network dietitian, urgent care clinic, and therapist. Her health plan’s website isn’t just outdated; it’s wrong. The directory listed 5 family clinics’ addresses incorrectly as urgent care clinics, and didn’t list the only urgent care address at all.

“I’ve lived in 5 different states and have never had more trouble accessing care than I have in CA. I had to file a grievance against Kaiser to receive a timely therapy appointment.”

Charlie S. _____
San Francisco, CA

Charlie could not find a provider taking new patients, even though his plan’s provider directory had many listed as available. One doctor on the list suffered from dementia and had stopped seeing clients at all. When Charlie suggested to his plan they should confirm the accuracy of their list, he was told it’s the doctor’s responsibility to update them.

“I would get long lists of providers listed as taking new patients, only to call through to find NOT one taking new clients.”