

# What is an Independent Medical Group?

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When you “shop local” you’re making an investment in your community by supporting the livelihoods of your neighbors. You are also getting the most for your money through personalized service and artisanal products. But did you know that the benefits of shopping locally go beyond groceries and household items? They apply to healthcare, too.

Even if your healthcare provider’s office is blocks from your home, they might not be truly local. Healthcare providers are often part of large medical groups that are owned by a big corporation or an investment group operating across large, multi-state regions.

And when the organization that provides your care is based on the other side of the country, sometimes reporting to Wall Street, it can affect every aspect of your medical experience, from how long you sit in the waiting room to the bills that you pay afterwards.

## **What is a Medical Group?**

A medical group is a coalition of healthcare providers who organize as a business to take care of patients. They share medical records and billing systems, and contracts with insurance companies as an organization. This allows the providers to focus more on their patients.

It also means that patients don't have to worry about whether different providers in the group are "in network" for their insurance company. Rather than receiving separate bills from each specialist, patients will receive a single bill for all of their care within the group.

In a multispecialty medical group like Western Washington Medical Group, primary care providers and specialists work together to coordinate a patient's care. As trusted colleagues who share the same medical records system, primary care providers and specialists have access to their shared patients' medical history and prescriptions.

Since the patient is not responsible for sharing that information individually with each provider, there is less risk of receiving redundant diagnostics or conflicting prescriptions. Instead, providers can easily communicate directly with each other to develop complementary treatment plans.

## **Why Choose Independent and Local?**

Nearly all medical providers in the Northwest are part of a medical group, but few of them are local and independent. Many are owned by corporations or investment groups where the specific needs of individual communities are diluted by the scale of their operations. Investors make decisions for entire regions, which may not be attuned to the needs of our Pacific Northwest population and culture.

By contrast, at a local, independent medical group like WWMG, the owners are the healthcare providers themselves. They live in the communities they serve and their first priority is always patient well-being. Being local and independent means patients can receive personalized care, rather than being treated according to standard protocols dictated by a huge corporation.

Those corporate protocols can cost patients a lot of time and money – especially when they involve hospital services that could be provided at a clinic. Diagnostics at a hospital can cost patients three times as much as the same service at a clinic. Wait times can be unpredictable, since hospitals also receive emergencies that they must prioritize ahead of any scheduled appointments.

## Western Washington Medical Group Origins

When WWMG was established thirty years ago, independent medical groups were common. But the healthcare market has experienced significant consolidation over the last two decades and now less than a quarter of healthcare providers across the country belong to an independent medical group. WWMG is the only local, independent multi-specialty medical group in the Puget Sound region.

Today, WWMG comprises about 125 providers, including primary care doctors, medical and surgical specialists, nurse practitioners, psychologists, physician assistants and others who all work together to provide integrated care. Based in Snohomish County, WWMG providers are also located in Skagit, Whatcom, and Island Counties.

Learn more about WWMG by reading our FAQ.

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