

Amazon launches app-based health-care service for Seattle-based employees

February 21 2020, by Katherine Khashimova Long, The Seattle Times

In its most direct foray yet into the \$3.8 trillion medical sector, Amazon has launched a pilot program to administer health care services to many of its nearly 54,000 Seattle-area employees and their families.

An app, called Amazon Care, provides on-demand chat and video consultations with [medical professionals](#) and enables users to schedule in-person visits with clinicians at patients' homes or offices. Payment for the service routes through Amazon.com.

While Amazon has not hinted it plans to make Amazon Care available beyond its own 500,000-person U.S. workforce, industry watchers say Amazon's history of aggressive expansion, and its recent interest in the health care sector, suggest the company may have more far-reaching ambitions for the service.

"Amazon is in the business of reinventing business models," said Michael Abrams, managing partner at [health care management](#) consulting firm Numerof & Associates. "The kind of organization Amazon is suggests they're not going to stop with their own 54,000 people in Seattle, or their half-million people nationally. They're going to be scaling this up."

The service could also shrink [health care costs](#) for the company, a concern for employers nationally as premiums rise at nearly twice the rate of inflation, to an average of roughly \$20,000 per family in 2019, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

CNBC first reported in summer 2018 that Amazon planned to open primary care clinics for Seattle-area employees. Amazon Care appears to be a step toward such plans.

Amazon Care clinicians are employed by Oasis Medical Group, which Amazon describes as "a medical practice licensed in Washington State."

Oasis, which does not have a website and is in Amazon's Prime building on Mercer Street, according to business filings, was founded in April 2018 by Dr. Martin Levine.

Amazon hired Levine, a Seattle geriatrician, in January 2018, a period when the company was beginning to explore opportunities in the [health care sector](#).

Levine joined other high-profile Amazon hires, including former One Medical vice president Christine Henningsgaard, and Missy Krasner, from the digital health-records management company Box.

Around the same time, the company formed a health care consortium with Berkshire Hathaway and JPMorgan Chase. The organization, later dubbed Haven, aims to leverage better service and rates from [health care providers](#) on behalf of the triumvirate's nearly 1.2 million employees.

A few months later, Amazon purchased online drugstore Pillpack for \$753 million. And last year, the company won landmark approval allowing its voice-activated AI, Alexa, to transmit private patient information.

Amazon is by no means the first big company to establish an in-house clinic to treat employees. Apple last year founded its own clinic network. Similarly, Boeing works directly with care providers to more closely monitor how they handle employees' health.

Employers have known for years that on-demand health care boosts [employee](#) productivity, said Dr. Jeffrey Harris, chair of health services at the University of Washington's School of Public Health. And starting with an online consultation can save both time and money.

"It takes more than two hours for me to see my primary care provider for something that could have been handled over a video call in 15 minutes or fewer," he said. "The lost productivity of having people go out to get care is significant."

A statement from the company said the service "eliminates travel and wait time," helping "employees get fast access to healthcare without an appointment, at the convenience of their schedules."

For now, Amazon Care is limited to employees and their families enrolled in an Amazon health insurance plan—ruling out part-time workers, including some of the [company](#)'s warehouse and grocery employees, who are ineligible for [health](#) care through their employer.

An Amazon spokesperson declined to respond to questions about the Amazon Care project.

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