

New health network coming to North Bay this fall

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Come this fall, a new insurance health network will be entering the North Bay market.

Based in Emeryville, Canopy Health was launched a year ago by University of California San Francisco Health and John Muir Health, and was formerly known as The Bay Area Accountable Care Network.

Already, Canopy Health (not to be confused with Canopy Health Insurance, based in Denver) has added seven new hospitals to their network. Those include Marin General Hospital; Sonoma Valley Hospital; San Ramon Regional Medical Center; Alameda Health System's Alameda, Highland and San Leandro hospitals; and Washington Hospital Healthcare System.

Within the past few months, Canopy has also added three new physician groups to the enterprise, both corporate shareholders and participating providers, creating a provider base of more than 4,000 physicians throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. These new shareholders include and Meritage Medical Network, with physicians in Marin, Sonoma and Napa counties; Hill Physicians Medical Group, representing physicians throughout Northern California; Muir Medical Group IPA, participating as part of the John Muir Physician Network in Contra Costa, southern Solano and eastern Alameda counties.

"We've made significant strides in a short amount of time as we work to provide Bay Area residents with an option to choose Canopy Health during open enrollment in the fall of 2016," said Joel Criste, Canopy Health CEO and former CEO of the Meritage Medical Network of doctors in Marin, Sonoma and Napa counties.

Canopy plans to serve a broad population and compete by lowering the total cost of care by lowering premium rates, and offering access points across the Bay area.

"It will be an opportunity to access care where you live and work," Criste said. "We are provider-owned and governed, trying to balance the best quality with the best price."

A possible advantage for Canopy is that both Hill Physicians and Muir Medical Group are accountable care organizations, or ACOs, a network of doctors and hospitals that shares financial and medical responsibility for providing coordinated care to patients. The possibility exists for an ACO to save costs with efficiency, and with a collaborative network, the potential for greater patient service.

"What might be different is that they don't appear to be offering just another PPO," said Keith McNeil, partner at Petaluma-based Arrow Benefits Group, referring to preferred-provider organizations. "If their goal is a more accountable care model, that would be a twist on a traditional PPO."

Launched in March 2015, the network has also signed a contract with Health Net to provide Canopy Health coverage to the 13,000 University of California employees and their families who are currently enrolled in the Health Net Blue & Gold plan with San Francisco Hill Physicians Medical Group. The group is also in discussions with other insurers to offer products for 2017.

“Health care has changed dramatically over the past few years. Our emerging network, with the addition of primary care and specialist physicians from Hill, John Muir Physician Network, and Meritage, and exceptional local hospitals, is poised to provide patients with access to the full spectrum of high-quality, affordable care that they need and deserve,” said Mark R. Laret, president and CEO of UCSF Health and chair of the Canopy Health board of directors.