

Navigating the Health Care System in Alberta

Getting Connected to Health Care Professionals: Options for accessing care –

1. www.albertahealthservices.ca or look for AHS phone app
2. Health Link – talk to a Nurse at 811
3. Urgent Care Centre/ Walk In Clinics – alternative to emergency room for minor concerns
4. Community and Public Health Centers/Family Care Clinics – on going health care management
5. Pharmacist – capable of providing substantial information, a great resource
6. Family Doctor – find on [College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta/Alberta Primary Care Network](#)
7. Emergency Department – Note: this is your LAST option - TRIAGE
See website: <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/options/Page11973.aspx>

Communicating with your Health Care Team

1. **FAMILY DOCTOR:** Build a relationship and develop good communication, so he/she will know your medical history and notice changes in your functioning when things are going wrong. Ask friends and family if they have a doctor they like. Find a list of doctors who are accepting new patients at the *College of Physicians and Surgeons* website or *Primary Care Network*. Meet the doctor and make sure it's a good fit. Shop around; find someone who you trust and feel comfortable with. Confirm with the doctor that they will accept you as their patient.
2. **COMMUNICATION:** Poor communication is the number one threat to a good relationship with your health care providers. To keep the lines of communication open make sure you are being realistic and clear about what you want from your physician. Time is also a barrier to a good relationship; appointments can be rushed, as doctor schedules are often tight. Some strategies to help get the most from your doctor's visit might include:
 - a. *Are you ready for the doctor's visit?*
 - i. Write down a few of your priority questions or concerns to discuss with your doctor. Make a longer appointment if you have lots to discuss, that is important right now.
 - ii. Bring a list of all your medications and the dosages, or simply bring all your current medications with you to the appointment. Note: This includes vitamins and supplements.
 - iii. When sharing concerns with your doctor, be brief and to the point. Describe your symptoms: when they started, how long they've lasted, where they are located, and what you do that makes it better or worse. If it's relevant: mention if you've had similar problems in the past, changed diet or medications, what worries you most about the symptoms and what you think is causing them.
 - iv. Try not to self-diagnose. Focus on the symptoms; you might write out your symptoms and bring this with you so that you do not forget.

- b. *What are some important questions to ask?*
- i. Diagnosis – ask what caused your “problem”, is it contagious, what the outlook is (prognosis), what can be done.
 - ii. Discuss possible treatments with their advantages and disadvantages are the treatments, and their advantages/disadvantages. Note: your problem may not require medications. Sometimes we feel like we have wasted our time if we leave the doctor’s office without a prescription. But not all bugs need drugs! It is not a waste of time to explore what is causing your illness and to find out what symptoms to look out for which may indicate something more serious is happening.
 - iii. Consider a follow up visit, what symptoms to watch out for, what should you do if they occur.
 - iv. Ask for a Second Opinion if you feel you want that assurance: *“I still feel confused and uncomfortable with this treatment. I feel that another opinion might reassure me. Can you suggest someone I could see?”* Or, just seek another provider without speaking to your family doctor about it.
- c. *What is your role in the healing process?*
- i. Be involved; take responsibility for your own health!
 - ii. Be sure to repeat back to the doctor what you have understood of his/her instructions.
Or, take another person with you to the appointment to help you process and recall the information, later.
 - iii. If necessary, ask the provider to write things down for you. Ask them to recommend reading material, or refer you to other places to get help.
 - iv. If you cannot follow the doctor’s advice, let them know “I didn’t take that medication because it gives me bad dreams”. When they know why you chose not to follow the prescription, they may be able to make different suggestions.

Referrals to other Professionals

1. If the doctor refers you somewhere else such as to a specialist, ask to get the information in writing or ask the doctor’s office to set up an appointment for you. Call your referring doctor back if you are unsure what is happening. Still waiting? Call again!
2. If you are sent to *Emergency* – Ask the doctor to call ahead and let them know what’s happening or ask for a letter of introduction or even a quick note on a prescription pad to give to the Emergency room triage nurse explaining the details of your situation. This also lets the nurse better assess the urgency of your situation.

PCN: Primary Care Network

Some Family Doctors are connected to *Primary Care Networks* which have many other services and professionals available. These might include: dieticians, counselors, occupational therapists, social workers.... Ask at your Doctor’s office if there are services available through their PCN. Free service.

Alberta Health Services (AHS) Interpreters

When you are in the hospital, AHS staff will have access to translators over the phone or in person. If you feel that it would help to communicate in another language – request a translator/interpreter. This is a free service and an integral part of equitable access to healthcare. It is your right. These interpreters maintain confidentiality about what is discussed. They know they would lose their jobs if they were to reveal any details they learn about you or your situation while they are offering interpretive services. Family doctors who are not staff of AHS, may not have access to this service.

Hospital Emergency Rooms

Hospital emergency rooms can be very busy and overloaded! They are going to address (TRIAGE) the most urgent cases first. You cannot assume that someone will be back to check on you in a timely manner or that they know everything that's going on with you. It can sometimes be a very chaotic place. Ask people to identify themselves and their role. You should advocate for yourself or a family member – politely but firmly.

Advocating for Yourself

This may be necessary, on occasion. You can leave the waiting room and go to the nursing desk to ask questions or communicate your concerns. Tell staff if you are very hungry or thirsty. Tell them when you are in pain. Ask if medication is appropriate for you and your situation. Ask for an Interpreter (if there is a language barrier and you are having trouble understanding). Ask for spiritual/pastoral care if you need to talk, someone to sit with you and provide some comfort. This is available!

If you are in the hospital, there are professionals available to help you get the answers you seek. Ask for the Charge Nurse, the Unit Manager and/or a Social Worker

Unresolved Concerns and Complaints in Alberta Health Services

If you have a complaint or a concern, you may contact Patient Relations, with more information found on the AHS website. This service is where patients, family members, and the public may express complaints about the health services they receive through Alberta Health Services (AHS). It also receives suggestions, and compliments. The Patient Concerns Officer and The Executive Director of Patient Relations are available to work with patients and AHS leaders to resolve a complaint until all possible avenues within AHS have been explored.

- Because your care team knows you best, discuss your concern with them, first. This may resolve the issue right away. You may also ask the manager of the program or service area for help.
- If you still wish to talk with someone else to share your concerns:
Contact by Telephone: Patient Relations Department 1-855-550-2555 or Fax: 1-877-871-4340
Contact by Mail: Patient Concerns Officer and Executive Director, Patient Relations
Mail Slot #57, 11111 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 0L4

Once they hear from you, a Patient Relations Representative will be in touch with you by phone within three business days. This person will clarify the details of your concern, and staff will work with you to resolve the concern.

Contacts and Other Resources:

College of Physicians and Surgeons: Website: <http://www.cpsa.ca>

By email: Public inquiries: publicinquiries@cpsa.ab.ca
Complaints (email cannot be used to [file a complaint](#)): complaints@cpsa.ab.ca

By phone/fax: Main line: 780-423-4764 | Main Fax: 780-420-0651
Public Inquiries: 1-800-561-3899 (in Canada)
Complaints: 1-800-661-4689 (in Canada)

By mail: College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta
2700 – 10020 100 Street NW
Edmonton, AB T5J 0N3 Canada

If you are a senior seeking additional resources:
Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton
Hours of Operation: 8:00 am - 4:00 pm Monday - Friday
Phone: (780) 423-5510
Fax: (780) 426-5175
E-mail: info@MySage.ca

If you are a newcomer to Canada and have concerns relating to immigration or other matters contact:
Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
<http://emcn.ab.ca/>
info@emcn.ab.ca
780-424-7709

Multicultural Health Brokers
<http://mchb.org/>
Phone: 780.423.1973
Fax: 780.428.2748
Email: mchb@mchb.org
Mailing Address: 9538 -107 Ave. Edmonton, AB T5H 0T7