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Why does AHS have a policy on Appropriate Prioritization of Access to Health Services?

AHS developed a [policy](#) to help guide and support AHS personnel (anyone providing care or services or acting on behalf of AHS) in determining appropriate prioritization of access to AHS-managed health services. The policy explains what preferential access is, one's responsibility in ensuring it does not occur, and what to do if it does. Ensuring consistency in how Albertans access health services promotes public confidence in the integrity of our workforce and clinical operations.

Background:

The policy responds to recommendations made in the August 2013 [report](#) of the Health Services Preferential Access Inquiry established by the Alberta government under the *Health Quality Council of Alberta Act*.

While the Inquiry cited no evidence of wide-spread improper preferential access, it did identify system vulnerabilities which could result in improper access. The Inquiry called for AHS to develop a policy to address preferential access concerns, with full consideration of the Inquiry's findings and in consultation with AHS staff, physicians, professional groups and the public.

What is the Appropriate Prioritization of Access to Health Services policy?

The [policy](#) provides guidance in determining appropriate prioritization of access to AHS-managed health services. It includes a listing of core ethical principles, statements on promoting integrity and consistency, key definitions and direction on ensuring preferential access does not occur.

Accompanying the policy is a [procedure](#) on what health services AHS may be required to provide to Internationally Protected Persons, under an international convention Canada is bound to uphold.

The policy and procedure applies to all AHS personnel (anyone providing care or services or acting on behalf of AHS) within AHS-managed settings.

The [AHS Safe Disclosure / Whistleblower Policy](#) , [AHS Investigations Policy](#) and the provincial [Public Interest Disclosure \(Whistleblower Protection\) Act](#) (PIDA) are key supporting documents and should be referenced when there are any alleged concerns of preferential access.

Further information and support tools are available [here](#) or on [Insite](#).

What resources are available to assist in understanding and applying the policy?

Online resources such as [sample scenarios](#) have been developed to assist AHS personnel (anyone providing care or services or acting on behalf of AHS) in understanding and applying the [policy](#).

If you would like to learn more about the policy, please contact your local medical leader. Alternatively, you may contact the [AHS Chief Ethics and Compliance Officer](#) or [AHS Policy & Forms](#).

For guidance in the ethical management of decisions regarding priority of access to health services, please contact [AHS Clinical Ethics Services](#).

How is appropriate priority of access to AHS health services determined?

Health need is the central factor in determining the appropriate priority of access to AHS-managed health services. Health care providers determine this using their professional judgment in consideration of the patient context.

When determining priority of access to health services, decisions should demonstrate alignment with the ethical principles in the [policy](#) and comply with any applicable AHS governance documents (i.e. policies, procedures and practice support documents), AHS operational standards and government legislation.

What is preferential access?

Preferential access is the purposeful granting of access to health services to one individual over another with more urgent health needs without supporting evidence or justification. This is a summary definition, see [policy](#) for full definition.

What is professional courtesy and what does the policy say about it?

The [policy](#) defines professional courtesy as *'health care professionals providing health services within the scope of their own practice to other health care professionals, their families or friends.'*

The policy recognizes that professional courtesy occurs amongst healthcare professionals within publicly-funded health services managed by AHS.

Professional regulatory colleges that govern a health care profession may not have standards and expectations that expressly address professional courtesy. In such an instance, the policy will govern professional courtesy practices for persons, working within publicly-funded health services managed by AHS, who are required to comply with this policy.

The framework provided in Section 2.1 of the policy and the resources listed in Section 9.3 of the policy may provide health care professionals with guidance in assessing whether or not a circumstance of professional courtesy is appropriate.

What if I am requested to provide preferential access?

The [policy](#) states:

"AHS personnel (anyone providing care or services or acting on behalf of AHS), are not authorized to request or accept a request for preferential access to publicly funded health services managed by AHS."

Most requests can be effectively dealt with by explaining that access to AHS-managed health services is based on the priority health need of the patient.

When this is not effective or in situations that are quite complex, refer to the policy, and consult with your local medical leader. You may also consult with the [AHS Chief Ethics and Compliance Officer](#) or [AHS Clinical Ethics](#).

To ensure transparency, where complex decisions were made, document your due diligence (see Section 9.3(a)(ii) of the policy).

How do I report an alleged incident of preferential access?

Preferential access is an ‘improper activity.’ When there are concerns or allegations of preferential access, AHS personnel (anyone providing care or services or acting on behalf of AHS) must disclose it and are protected from retaliation under the [AHS Safe Disclosure / Whistleblower Policy](#) and the provincial [Public Interest Disclosure \(Whistleblower Protection\) Act](#) (PIDA).

Your disclosure must be made in good faith, and not put forward through malice or for personal benefit.

Whenever possible, your first course of action is to report the alleged incident to your local medical leader.

Alternatively, you may disclose directly to the AHS Chief Ethics and Compliance Officer by [email](#) or Fax: 1-780-735-1450.

Confidential disclosures can be reported through the Safe Disclosure Line; a toll free, 24/7 external confidential reporting and disclosure service at 1-800-661-9675.

What is AHS doing to improve access to health services?

The AHS Provincial Access Team is working to improve access to health services. Further details can be found on [Insite](#).

The Quality and Healthcare Improvement team, in partnership with operations, is also engaged in improvement work through the use of the Alberta Improvement Way (AIW). Further details can be found on [Insite](#).