

Appropriate Prioritization of Access to Health Services Policy – Policy Summary

Why was this policy created?

AHS provides equitable access to health services for Albertans no matter where in the province they live, who they are, or what health concerns they may have.

To reinforce that commitment, AHS has developed an [Appropriate Prioritization of Access to Health Services policy](#) which will come into effect December 17th, 2015.

The policy helps physicians and health care providers working within AHS to ensure equity and consistency in determining priority of access, so Albertans can continue to be confident in the integrity of our provincial health system, workforce and clinical operations.

As the policy was developed in consultations with physicians, health care providers and other key internal and external stakeholders it reflects and expands on what we're already doing:

- Health need continues to be the central factor in determining the appropriate priority of access to AHS-managed health services.
- Physicians and health care providers continue to determine health need using their professional judgment and in consideration of the patient context.
- Their decisions will continue to demonstrate alignment with AHS governance documents (i.e. policies, procedures and practice support documents), applicable operational standards, and provincial and federal legislation.
- Going forward, decisions will also align with the ethical principles outlined in the policy.
- Preferential access is not acceptable within our provincial health system.

The policy also meets three of eight recommendations made in the 2013 provincial [Health Services Preferential Access Inquiry report](#). While the report concluded that there was no evidence of widespread improper access, it did identify potential vulnerabilities within the health system.

What is in the policy?

The [policy](#) reinforces AHS' stance on the appropriate prioritization of access to provincial health services and confirms what we are already doing — applying the policy does not entail a new approach.

The policy outlines a decision making framework that guides physicians and health care providers in appropriately determining access. The framework is built upon the premise that we trust the judgment and skills of our health care providers and acknowledges that determining access can be quite complex. For situations where the best course of action in granting access is less straightforward, the policy provides guidance and leads to key [resources](#).

The policy also includes core ethical principles, key definitions, and addresses a number of access matters including preferential access: preferential access is not allowed within AHS-managed health settings. Commentary is also provided on patient advocacy and health care navigation, site courtesy notifications (heads-up calls), professional courtesy, and what should occur during a pandemic, outbreak or declared emergency.

A [procedure document](#) accompanies the policy and details what health services AHS may be required to provide to Internationally Protected Persons under an international convention Canada is bound to uphold.

How was the policy developed?

Physicians and many other internal and external stakeholders were consulted in developing the policy. Feedback was obtained through surveys, targeted letters requesting feedback, and in-person consultations. The Preferential Access Working Group membership included a physician leader, and drafts of the evolving policy were discussed and/or reviewed by:

- Individual Frontline physicians;
- Zone Medical Administrative Committees (ZMACs);
- Provincial Practitioner Executive Committee (PPEC);
- Zone Medical Directors;
- The AMA: AHS Physician Liaison Forum

What actions are needed for this policy to be successful?

Physicians play an important leadership role within health care teams, and as such, AHS is looking for your support in informing your colleagues and other staff that this policy is now in effect.

In gaining understanding in how to apply the policies ethical principles in day-to-day practice, helpful resources are highlighted in the policy and listed on the [Medical Staff webpage](#).