

TITLE

FEE WAIVERSSCOPE

Provincial

DOCUMENT

FS-02

APPROVAL LEVEL

Alberta Health Services Executive Committee

SPONSOR

Finance

INITIAL EFFECTIVE DATE

June 30, 2015

CATEGORY

Financial Stewardship

REVISED

Not applicable

NOTE: The first appearance of terms in bold in the body of this document (except titles) are defined terms – please refer to the Definitions section.

If you have any questions or comments regarding the information in this policy, please contact the Policy & Forms Department at policy@albertahealthservices.ca. The Policy & Forms website is the official source of current approved policies, procedures, directives, and practice support documents.

PURPOSE

- To provide direction on the process for documenting, approving, processing, reporting, and monitoring applications for **fee waivers** due to a **patient's** financial hardship or for compassionate or humanitarian reasons.

POLICY STATEMENT

Alberta Health Services (AHS) provides inpatient, outpatient, ambulance, and other medical and non-medical goods and services in accordance with applicable legislation. The vast majority of goods and services are provided free of charge to Albertans, namely insured goods and services. Fees are charged for **billable goods and services**. In addition, at times AHS provides goods and services to non-residents, uninsured residents, and organizations, all of which attract fees.

In certain circumstances as set out in this policy, AHS may provide financial relief to eligible patients who have difficulty making payments for billable goods and services, due to financial hardship, humanitarian or compassionate reasons.

APPLICABILITY

Compliance with this policy is required by all Alberta Health Services employees, members of the medical and midwifery staffs, students, volunteers, and other persons acting on behalf of Alberta Health Services (including contracted service providers as necessary), with responsibilities for the processing of fee waiver applications. This policy does not limit any legal rights to which you may otherwise be entitled.

POLICY ELEMENTS

1. Eligibility

- 1.1 Canadian residents are eligible for fee waivers in certain circumstances outlined in this policy. Non-residents of Canada are not eligible for fee waivers, except for a **protected person (refugee), refugee claimant, rejected refugee claimant, or trafficked person or victim**.
- 1.2 Fee waivers may be applied to all patient fees except:
 - a) physician fees, goods, and facility fees associated with **uninsured elective and cosmetic procedures**, as per the AHS *Facility Fees for Uninsured Elective and Cosmetic Procedures* Policy; and
 - b) fees associated with **patient-requested upgrades**.
- 1.3 Fee waivers associated with pharmaceuticals related to cancer care shall be approved in accordance with policies established by Alberta Health Services Cancer Control.
- 1.4 Fee waivers associated with AHS Continuing Care Charges Reduction/Waivers shall follow the Continuing Care Charges application process.
- 1.5 Medications dispensed by Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) clinics shall be subject to fee waivers in accordance with applicable legislation, regulation, and established criteria.

2. Applications

- 2.1 Applications to waive fees may be made by the patient, and may be granted due to financial hardship or humanitarian reasons as per the AHS *Financial Hardship Fee Waiver Application* Form.
 - a) Financial hardship is determined in accordance with established financial criteria. Criteria are based on the patient's overall financial position and take into consideration family income (based on Statistics Canada Low-Income Cut-Off [LICO] thresholds), total assets and total liabilities. Patients who meet the criteria and are unable to pay for billed services without jeopardizing their ability to meet basic living expenses may be granted a fee waiver.
 - b) Waivers for humanitarian reasons may only be granted to a protected person (refugee), refugee claimant, rejected refugee claimant, or trafficked person or victim.

Note: The patient shall demonstrate all reasonable sources of funding have been explored prior to applying for a fee waiver due to financial hardship or humanitarian reasons.

- 2.2 Applications for financial hardship or humanitarian reasons shall be approved by Finance (Accounts Receivable) in accordance with the *AHS Delegation of Authority for Financial Commitments Policy and Authorization Table*.
- 2.3 Applications to waive fees may be made by the program area for compassionate reasons as per the *AHS Compassionate Fee Waiver Application Form*.
 - a) Compassionate status shall be determined by the specific circumstances of the patient, including, but not limited to:
 - (i) homelessness;
 - (ii) death;
 - (iii) acts of violence inflicted by a third party;
 - (iv) an assessment, treatment or procedure associated with an act by a good samaritan; and
 - (v) large scale natural disasters or emergencies pursuant to the *Public Health Act* (Alberta) or in the case of a public health emergency or a declared public health emergency.
- 2.4 All applications for fee waivers submitted to a program area shall be forwarded to Finance (Accounts Receivable) via e-mail at AHS_Collections@albertahealthservices.ca. Program areas must ensure applications submitted to Finance include, at a minimum, the following information:
 - a) the date of application;
 - b) the name and contact details of the patient;
 - c) written rationale and appropriate approval, in accordance with the *AHS Fee Waiver Authorization Table*, for applications for fee waivers for compassionate reasons; and
 - d) supporting documentation.
- 2.5 Applications for compassionate reasons shall be approved by the program area in accordance with the *AHS Fee Waiver Authorization Table*.

- 2.6 Finance will apply a tracking number on receipt of each application. Subsequent enquiries pertaining to each application shall reference the Finance tracking number.

3. Appeals

- 3.1 Patients may appeal denied applications within 30 days of the date on the Denial of Fee Waiver letter. To appeal a decision, patients shall submit a written request to Finance which includes rationale and documentation to support the appeal. The Finance tracking number in the Denial of Fee Waiver letter must be included with the written request. Patients may appeal a denied application a maximum of two (2) times.
- 3.2 Humanitarian or financial hardship fee waiver appeals shall be reviewed and approved by Finance by an authorized employee other than the initial approver and escalated to the appropriate level based on the dollar value and circumstances of the fee waiver per the AHS *Delegation of Authority for Financial Commitments Policy and Authorization Table*.
- 3.3 Compassionate fee waiver appeals shall be reviewed by the program area by an employee other than the initial approver and escalated to the appropriate level based on the dollar value and circumstances of the fee waiver (see AHS *Fee Waiver Authorization Table*). Reviewed appeals shall be submitted to Finance for processing with a recommendation on whether to grant the appeal.

4. Processing Responsibilities

- 4.1 All fees charged by AHS shall be entered into the AHS financial system electronically either by Finance or Admitting.
- 4.2 Finance shall:
- a) review all fee waiver application forms received from program areas or directly from the patient;
 - b) review all financial hardship and humanitarian fee waiver applications and relevant supporting documentation, and approve applications in accordance with the AHS *Delegation of Authority for Financial Commitments Policy and Authorization Table*;
 - c) ensure AHS *Compassionate Fee Waiver Applications* have been appropriately approved by the applicable program area;
 - d) issue a Notification of Approval or Denial of Fee Waiver letter to the patient within 30 working days of receipt of a completed application;

- e) communicate to the patient and the program area as applicable, the outcome of an appeal; and
 - f) place patient accounts on hold for applications for fee waivers that are pending.
- 4.3 Finance may conduct periodic audits to ensure that all fees have been entered into the AHS financial system, and that all fee waivers have been adequately documented and approved.
- 4.4 Segregation of duties shall be maintained among the functions of approving fee waivers, processing fee waivers, and related journal entries in the AHS financial system.

5. Records Retention

- 5.1 Documentation pertaining to fee waivers, including applications shall be retained in accordance with the AHS *Records Retention Schedule* (#1133-01).

DEFINITIONS

Billable goods and services means any goods or services provided by AHS which are:

- a) related to medical treatment of a patient; and
- b) billable to a patient or their insurer by law and/or by order of the Minister of Health.

Fee waiver means a decision by AHS, based on evidence of financial hardship, humanitarian, or compassionate reasons, to remove a patient's obligation to pay for billable services and or goods received.

Patient means all persons who receive or have requested health care or services from AHS and its health care providers, and also means, where applicable:

- a) a co-decision-maker with the person; or
- b) an alternate decision-maker on behalf of the person.

Patient-requested upgrades means any goods or services requested by the patient classified as:

- a) enhanced medical goods or services, as defined by the *Health Care Protection Act* (Alberta); or
- b) non-medical goods or services which are not medically warranted as determined by the most responsible health practitioner.

Protected person (Refugee) means a person who has been determined to be a Convention refugee or person in similar circumstances by a Canadian visa officer outside Canada, a person whom the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada has determined to be a Convention refugee or in need of protection in Canada, or a person who has had a positive pre-removal risk assessment (in most cases).

Refugee claimant means a person who has applied for refugee protection status while in Canada and is waiting for a decision on his/her claim from the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.

Rejected refugee claimant means a person who has applied for refugee protection status while in Canada and the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada has denied their request.

Trafficked person or victim means a person who is exploited through recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

Uninsured elective and cosmetic procedures means procedures which are performed by authorized personnel at the discretion of the patient, are not considered medically necessary by the most responsible health practitioner, and are not insured under the current Schedule of Medical Benefits or any other document published by Alberta Health.

REFERENCES

- Alberta Health Services Governance Documents:
 - *Code of Conduct*
 - *Collection, Use, Access, and Disclosure of Information Policy* (#1112)
 - *Collection of Overdue Accounts Standard* (#BSFO/AR/001)
 - *Delegation of Authority for Financial Commitments Policy* (#1118)
 - *Facility Fees for Uninsured Elective and Cosmetic Procedures Policy* (#BSFO-008)
 - *Journal Entry Policy* (#FR-001)
 - *Patient Concerns Resolution Policy* (#PRR-02)
 - *Patient Concerns Resolution Process Procedure* (#PRR-02-01)
- Alberta Health Services Forms:
 - *Financial Hardship Fee Waiver Application* (#19071)
 - *Compassionate Fee Waiver Application* (#19070)
- Alberta Health Services Resources:
 - *Delegation of Authority for Financial Commitments Authorization Table*
 - *Fee Waiver Authorization Table*
 - *Records Retention Schedule* (#1133-01)
 - *Receivable Types*
- Non-Alberta Health Services Documents:
 - *Health Care Protection Act* (Alberta)
 - *Public Health Act* (Alberta)

VERSION HISTORY

Date	Action Taken
June 30, 2015	Initial approval/effective
August 11, 2015	Correction to form number referenced for Fee Waiver Application (#19071)
June 2018	Scheduled for review