

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Alberta's Palliative Physician Service

Providing high-quality palliative and end of life care (PEOLC) for Albertans is a critical role for all physicians. In 2014, clinicians from across Alberta supported the development of a common framework to guide the development of PEOLC services, which included common definitions of palliative care and end of life care. These definitions emphasized that palliative care should be considered a component of care from the time of a life-limiting diagnosis, irrespective of the particular diagnosis.

Palliative care aims to improve the quality of life of patients and families facing the problems associated with a life-limiting/life-threatening illness through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification, comprehensive interdisciplinary assessments and appropriate interventions.

End of life care is care provided to an individual and their family when the individual is approaching a period of time closer to death, which may be exemplified by an intensification of services and assessments.

Palliative care encompasses a variety of approaches and interventions; for an individual, these will change over time. For example, following a life-limiting diagnosis, emotional and social support may be the main needs, whereas later physical assistance and symptom management may become the predominant needs.

"The 24/7 On-Call Provincial Palliative Physician Service provides physicians across Alberta urgent access to 24/7 consult support from an on-call palliative physician specialist via RAAPID (referral, access, advice, placement, information and destination)."

Who can provide palliative care?

PEOLC can be provided in any care location and by a variety of health care providers, community supports, family and friends. All physicians can provide PEOLC. Most PEOLC is provided in the community by family physicians, hence the importance of 24/7 access to PEOLC physician specialists when advice or help is needed.

When is it appropriate to refer to palliative care services?

Referrals can be made when support is required for managing complex palliative needs related to a patient's life-threatening, life-limiting disease. This support may include:

- symptom assessment and management advice
- supports specific to education for patients, families or health care providers
- help with advanced care planning and goals of care designation orders
- exploring PEOLC options including locations of care

How to refer to palliative care in the province

Access to palliative care specialists on a 24/7 basis was an identified need within the framework. The 24/7 On-Call Provincial Palliative Physician Service provides physicians across Alberta urgent access to 24/7 consult support from an on-call palliative physician specialist via RAAPID (referral, access, advice, placement, information and destination).

[Please go here](#) to find more information about how to refer to PEOLC in Alberta, including zone specific information and contacts. Referral information and forms are also in the *Alberta Referral Directory*. Some zone teams are also available on *Calgary's Specialist Link* (www.specialistlink.ca) and *Netcare eAdvice*.

RAAPID North (for patients north of Red Deer) toll-free 1.800.282.9911 (Canada only); 780.735.0811.

RAAPID South (for patients in and south of Red Deer) toll-free 1.800.661.1700 (Canada only); 403.944.4486.

[Please email with questions](#) and/or for additional information.

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