

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Efficient referrals for better patient care

Knowledge is power. In the case of referrals to health specialists, knowledge means better patient care. The [Alberta Referral Directory](#) (ARD) is a rich resource for patients, physicians, and health care professionals looking for specialist services in all areas of Alberta's health system.

The ARD is freely accessible online and is a rich source of information about the referral services available to Albertans. It's managed by [Path to Care](#), a service that works to improve the referral experience for patients across the health system. The ARD provides a single source of accurate content for managing referrals, from the services available to the forms and processes required to move a referral forward.

Lisa Beaulne, Director of Path to Care, explains convenient access to referral information is a benefit for physicians, their patients, and the specialists. Path to Care has worked hard to ensure the ARD is robust, accurate, and easy to use. Those looking to send a referral can easily find information, and specialist services can take charge of their referral information. Additional benefits for physicians include fewer steps to view referral requirements and no passwords to remember.

"Anyone can see what services are available and the estimated routine wait times across the province," says Lisa. "Our goals were to make the referral process more transparent and encourage collaboration between physicians and patients."

Because the ARD provides information about many health services in addition to physician consultations, there are more care options to choose from while waiting for a consult. For example, a search on gastrointestinal services would bring up both physicians and nutrition support services. Because access to certain specialists can take time, the patient and their physician could decide which specialist to see and which services to use to manage the condition until their appointment.

"Ideally we'd see physicians and patients reviewing the options together," says Lisa. "The ARD is another tool that enables patients to be an active part of their own care team."

Inside Connect Care

In November, the ARD links became active within [Connect Care, making it more convenient than ever to manage referrals. With a click of a button, physicians on the system can see a range of options for their patients.](#)

Dr. Heidi Fell, Chair of the AMA Informatics Committee, is a leader in the work being done to create integrated information systems. She believes that patient care and physician well-being are both improved when more information is readily available while make care decisions.

“One of the core pillars of health care reform is the referral consultation process” explains Dr. Fell. “Patients need to be able to easily move through the health system, and the referral process should be straightforward for both referring physicians and specialist services. The enhanced referral directory and its addition to Connect Care are both steps in the right direction.”

Primary care physicians can access the ARD at albertareferraldirectory.ca, and they are encouraged to bookmark the search page for convenient access. While the ARD is easy to use, clinics can request for Path to Care to visit their offices to provide a quick learning session which covers all the unique features and benefits of the ARD.

The specialist services point of view

The ARD is fed by four information sources: The College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta, Alberta Health, Inform Alberta, and private services. All specialist consultants and service providers can update their own information, which helps ensure their referral processes are documented accurately.

Tricia Miller, South Zone Manager for Children’s Allied Health & Speech Language Pathology and Audiology, sees the changes in the ARD from the specialists’ point of view. She is particularly pleased with how the information in the ARD improves the accuracy and completeness of the referrals that come in. Much less time is spent on chasing down the right information.

“When a client, patient, or physician is looking for information, they can see what’s available as fast as they can type in the key words, and it helps them narrow down the right services,” says Tricia. “Physicians have access to everything they need to facilitate a straightforward referral. This is a good thing for our physicians and Albertans who could benefit from the services.”

Quality improvements in the ARD

Path to Care is committed to quality improvement in the ARD. There are nearly 4,000 searchable service profiles in the ARD, with a 91% average profile completeness rate. The team has a dedicated quality assurance resource reviewing the profiles for completeness, accuracy, and richness of information, and to ensure the profiles are aligned with those in Connect Care. This will allow physicians and patients to be confident that their referral has the right information, going to the right place, so that it can be accepted without delay.

Take a look at the ARD, and you’ll see just how much easier making referrals can be.

About Connect Care

[Connect Care](#) is the Alberta Health Services (AHS) provincial care transformation initiative. It is powered by a common provincial clinical information system that will replace most of the more than 1,300 existing systems across AHS.