

Establishing a Continuous Physician-Patient Relationship

The College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA) provides advice to Albertans to support improved patient care and safety. This advice does not define a standard of practice, nor should it be interpreted as legal advice.

Patient FAQs are dynamic and may be edited or updated for clarity at any time. Please refer back to these articles regularly to ensure you are aware of the most recent advice.

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Preamble

It's important to have a primary care provider to help manage your healthcare needs. It is always best to have one medical "home" with one healthcare provider to keep track of your health, any tests that have been ordered, referrals, etc. When you see more than one healthcare provider, it makes it harder for everyone to keep you safe and make sure you get proper care.

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How do I find a physician who is accepting new patients?

There are a few ways to find a physician who is accepting new patients:

- Ask friends or family members if their physicians are accepting new patients
- [Call Health Link](#) at 8-1-1 to speak to an Information and Referral Specialist
- Use the [Alberta Find a Doctor website](#) to get a list of physicians, nurse practitioners and clinics accepting new patients in your area
- Use [CPSA's Physician Directory](#) to find contact information for physicians in your area to call and ask if they are accepting new patients (note: [CPSA's Physician Directory](#) does not have an "accepting new patients" status)

Why do I have to meet the physician before I can be their patient?

Physicians may choose to use introductory appointments, or "meet & greets," to meet possible patients so they can share the services they provide and any clinic policies, as well as to understand the possible patient's needs and expectations.

Do I have to pay for this first appointment?

If the physician provides any healthcare service (e.g., performs an exam, orders blood work, gives you a prescription refill), they can bill Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan for the appointment.

If the physician does not provide any healthcare, they cannot bill Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan. They may choose to charge for the appointment as an uninsured professional service in accordance with our [Charging for Uninsured Professional Services](#) standard of practice, but they must let you know about the charge before the appointment so you can choose whether or not you want to attend and pay the fee.

Does the physician need my records before I meet them?

Ideally yes, but this is not always possible. As such, the physician can function without your records until after they have met with you and accepted you as a new patient.

Do I have to pay to have my records transferred?

The [Government of Alberta](#) allows healthcare providers to charge a reasonable fee for making copies of records (e.g., a \$25 administration fee that includes the first 20 pages of your record, plus 25¢ a page for each additional page), as well as charges for time to

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review the chart if needed). Your former physician should provide you with an estimate of the cost so you can decide if you want a copy.

If the cost of the copy is too high, your former physician must provide your new healthcare provider with a summary of important medical information at no cost to you.

What reasons cannot be used to refuse a patient?

The protected classes that cannot be used as reasons to refuse a patient include, but are not limited to:

- Race, colour or national/ethnic origin
- Religion
- Age
- Sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression
- Marital or family status
- Genetic characteristics
- Disability¹
- Conviction of an offence (including those for which a pardon has been granted or a record suspension has been ordered)²

You also cannot be refused because of medications you take, because you have complex medical conditions or because you need extensive health related services (e.g., reports or forms filled out after an injury).

If you think a physician has refused to accept you as a patient for one of these reasons, CPSA team members are available to talk. Please email support@cpsa.ca or call 1-800-561-3899.

If I'm refused, does the physician have to tell me why?

In most cases, a physician will let you know why they decided not to accept you as a patient.

¹ From the [Alberta Human Rights Act](#), Preamble (Dec. 15, 2022).

² From the [Canadian Human Rights Act](#) (1985).

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Can I be refused because I live too far away?

Generally speaking, no. If you are able and willing to travel to see your doctor, where you live is not a problem as long as it is in the same province. However, healthcare providers need to be able to assess and manage health concerns in a safe and timely manner. This may not be possible if they are not located near you.

If you are unable to make your appointments on time or can't see your doctor in person when necessary because you are too far away, your doctor may want to explore options with you.

Can I see more than one primary care physician?

It is always best to have one medical "home" with one healthcare provider to keep track of your health, any tests that have been ordered, referrals, etc. When you see more than one healthcare provider, it makes it harder for all parties to keep you safe and make sure you get proper care.

Your physician should talk to you to understand why you are seeing another physician (e.g., you needed care when the clinic was closed and went to a walk-in clinic). You should not be discharged for getting care from another healthcare provider when your physician isn't available.

If you see more than one primary care provider, your physician may ask you to choose just one (aside from urgent care needs or healthcare needed while their office is closed). If you continue to see more than one primary care provider, your physician may discharge you from their practice.

What should I do if I can't find a physician?

If you cannot find a physician, walk-in clinics are an option. If possible, you might want to use the same walk-in clinic for all your care, so all your information is in one place.

Please note: if you see the same walk-in physician on multiple occasions, this does not mean they automatically become your family physician. You will still need to ask the physician if they can accept you into their practice as your family physician.

You can also sign up for [My Health Records](#) through the Government of Alberta and [My AHS Connect](#) through Alberta Health Services to get notified when test results are

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available. You can go to a walk-in clinic to talk to a physician about the results and to figure out what to do next.

Resources

CPSA team members are available if you have questions. Please email support@cpsa.ca or call 1-800-561-3899.