cpsa
COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS & SURGEONS OF ALBERTA

ADVICE TO ALBERTANS

Patient-Ordered Testing

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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Introduction

CPSA sets rules for physicians and physician assistants to help keep patients safe. This document tells you what to expect from a physician who offers patient-ordered tests. It is not a standard of practice or legal advice.

For questions about government policies or programs, contact the Government of Alberta: General Inquiries.

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Patient-Ordered Testing

What are patient-ordered tests?

As of July 31, 2026, you can ask for some imaging tests without a referral from a healthcare provider. These are called patient-ordered tests.

These tests may include:

- MRI;
- CT;
- ultrasound; or
- X-ray.

When you ask for a test without a referral, you pay the facility for the test. Not every facility will offer every test: the tests included are only available at private diagnostic imaging facilities that provide them.

These tests are for care that is not urgent. If you have new or worsening symptoms, or need care soon, talk to a healthcare provider.

The Government of Alberta may also call these tests "preventative health testing," "patient choice," or "self-referral." CPSA uses the term "patient-ordered testing" in this document.

How is this different from a test my physician orders?

You ask for the test yourself: you do not need a referral from a healthcare provider.

You pay for the test. The Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan does not pay for patient-ordered tests.

A test your physician orders is different. If a physician decides that you need a specific test for your health, public healthcare will usually pay for it.

Can anyone get patient-ordered testing?

You may be able to get a test if:

- you are 18 or older;
- you are under 18 and your parent or guardian agrees; or

- another person is allowed by law to make health decisions for you (like a substitute decision-maker).

Can I get any test I want?

No. The Government of Alberta decides which tests can be offered.

Asking for a test does not mean you will get it. The physician must decide if it is safe and right for you.

What if the physician says no?

The physician cannot do a test that is unsafe or not right for you. They must also follow the law and CPSA *Standards of Practice*.

If a physician says no, you can ask why they made that decision and for more information on what other care could help you.

How much will I pay?

Each clinic sets its own fees and there is no set price for these tests.

The physician or clinic must tell you what you will pay. Before you make a decision, ask what the clinic will charge for the visit and test, and if you must pay for the physician to review your results or get care after the test.

You can also ask if you have to pay for the assessment if the physician cannot do the test (see "What if the physician says no?").

What does the physician have to tell me before the test?

Before the test, the physician must tell you:

- what the test may or may not show;
- if it may help with your concern;
- its risks and side effects;
- if you may need more care after the test;
- what you must pay; and
- that the Government of Alberta may not pay you back.

You can ask questions before you decide. The physician must check that you understand the test.

What do I have to agree to before the test?

The physician must ask if you agree to the test.

You must also agree in writing to have some personal and health information added to your Alberta electronic health record, including the results of your test and any other reports about the test. If you need more medical care after the test, this lets other healthcare providers see information they may need to take care of you.

Without this written agreement, the physician cannot do the test.

When and how will I get my results?

The physician must tell you the results in person at the clinic within two (2) hours after the test.

What if I need more care after the test?

The physician must tell you who will look after your care after the test.

If you need more care, the physician must explain the next steps and help set up any care, tests or referrals you will need after the test. If another healthcare provider takes over, the physician must tell you who will look after your care.

What if I have questions or concerns?

Ask the clinic which tests it offers and what they cost.

For questions about getting money back from Alberta, email PPHS.PHTreimb@gov.ab.ca.

If you have a concern about a physician or a private imaging clinic, call CPSA at 1-800-561-3899 or email support@cpsa.ca.