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AHS implements new cell phone policy to address roaming and data overages

EDMONTON – Alberta Health Services has recently approved and implemented a new policy for cell phone and mobile device use.

The new policy was developed, in part, to respond to a request for information on mobile service costs through the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Results of the FOIP demonstrated a lack of clarity on who should get different types of mobile devices and also indicated that there were insufficient controls related to usage of these devices, in particular an individual's ability to use these phones outside of Canada.

The FOIP requested all monthly mobile device billing between June 2013 and November 2014 over \$500. Total charges are approximately \$850,000. The charges include roaming fees and data usage above and beyond standard packages.

"The numbers are very high," said Vickie Kaminski, President and CEO, AHS. "They are too high, and this demonstrated to me that we needed to take clear and decisive action to bring down these costs and make sure that all AHS staff and physicians with AHS-paid mobile devices are accountable and using their devices appropriately."

The [policy](#) is now clear and outlines expectations for our employees who require mobile devices to carry out their jobs.

In some cases, there are valid explanations for these data overages and roaming charges, and it's clear that the mobile devices were used to deliver care to patients remotely. In the case of the highest bill (\$20,000), the mobile was being used by a world renowned pediatric cardiology transplant physician who provided several consultations while travelling. In this particular case, the physician did have a roaming package in place, but the package was not sufficient. In other instances, employees took their phones on vacation, and the charges are a blend of personal and work-related usage.

"This type of usage has now stopped," said Kaminski. "The new policy outlines that AHS will not pay for roaming charges except in extraordinary cases."

Kaminski said that AHS is contacting those whose bills are significant to review the circumstances of the overages. Should it be determined that there was inappropriate use that resulted in the high costs, then AHS will take the most appropriate action it can, including having employees pay back the money.

Under the new policy, announced last week as part of several [cost-containment measures](#) AHS is implementing, should an employee travel outside of the country, by default international roaming will be disabled. To enable the phone for travel outside of the country, executive level approval will be required based on the fact the employee will be required to work and have access to documents, including those that are patient-related – while travelling outside the country.

Later this year, AHS will issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for cell phone/mobile device service to ensure a competitive service package.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.