

Frequently Asked Questions For Primary and Specialty Care Providers



FAST:
FACILITATED
ACCESS TO
SPECIALIZED
TREATMENT

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GENERAL INFORMATION

What is FAST?

Facilitated Access to Specialized Treatment (FAST) is a central intake and distribution program for surgical referrals. The program improves patient access to specialty care by centralizing referral intake, ensuring referrals are complete, and distributing referrals to specialists for triage. Referring providers can choose a next-available surgeon with the shortest waitlist; a specific surgeon, clinic, or site; or an out-of-zone provider.

The program is part of the [Alberta Surgical Initiative](#) and strives to ensure patients receive their scheduled surgeries within clinically appropriate targets. The program also helps referring providers and specialist reduce surgical wait times. For more information, visit ahs.ca/fast and review [FAST Facts](#).

Why should I partner with FAST?

Benefits for Referring Providers

- One fax number for all surgical referrals (one per specialty in Edmonton Zone).
- Referrals are assigned to next available provider, a named provider, or an out-of-zone specialist.
- [Referral Pathways](#) list standard referral requirements (e.g. labs, diagnostic imaging).
- Accurate wait time data available for your zone.
- Referral status available in [Netcare eReferral](#).

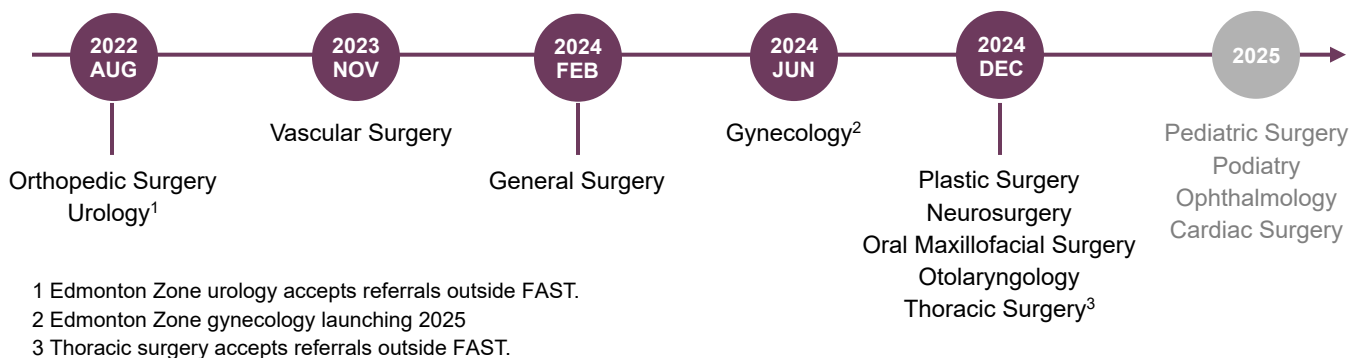
Benefits for Specialists

- Referrals are checked for completeness.
- Referrals are assigned by name or based on specialist's capacity to book consultations.
- Referral requirements are standardized and consistent across the province.
- Wait list data supports improvements to surgical referral process and patient care.

Are all surgical specialties using FAST?

Not yet. Specialties began working with FAST in August 2022 and will be fully onboarded by late 2025. See a timeline of specialty partners below:

- Specialties currently partnered with FAST.
- Future partnerships.



Which specialties have partnered with FAST?

Find current specialty partners listed in the table below.

Specialty	North Zone	Edmonton Zone	Central Zone	Calgary Zone	South Zone
Cardiac Surgery					
General Surgery	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Gynecology	✓		✓		✓
Neurosurgery	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ophthalmology					
Oral Maxillofacial Surgery	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Orthopedics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Otolaryngology	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pediatric Surgery					
Plastic Surgery	✓		✓	✓	
Podiatry					
Thoracic Surgery					
Urology	✓	✱	✓	✓	✓
Vascular Surgery	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

✓ Specialty in this zone accepts referrals via FAST.

✱ Specialty in this zone accepts direct referrals but shares data with FAST.

Does FAST align with CPSA standards for communication?

Yes. Communication between referring providers and surgeons is vital during the referral process. To align with the [CPSA standard of practice](#) of acknowledging the receipt of a referral within seven days, the FAST team aims to process complete referrals and communicate with referring providers within two business days, including information about the status of the referral and where it has been sent.

Once the referral is sent to the surgeon's office, the surgeon's office is responsible for meeting all further CPSA standards.



SUBMITTING REFERRALS TO FAST – FOR REFERRING PROVIDERS

Who can submit referrals to FAST?

Any practicing referring provider can submit a referral to FAST, including family physicians, nurse practitioners, and specialists. The referring provider must follow the patient's care.

How do I submit referrals to FAST?

Referrals must be submitted to the FAST team in your Zone. **DO NOT** send referrals to FAST teams in other zones as this may cause delays while the referral is redirected to the appropriate zone.

Connect Care users will send referrals to FAST by using the outgoing referral order workflows and internal referral order (only in Edmonton Zone). For neurosurgery and OMF in Edmonton Zone continue current process. Connect Care users cannot send referrals to South Zone FAST at this time. For more information, review the [Connect Care Referring Provider Tip Sheet](#).

Please consult the Referral Instructions for your Zone below:



Referral Instructions by Zone:

[North Zone](#) | [Edmonton Zone](#) | [Central Zone](#) | [Calgary Zone](#) | [South Zone](#)

Tip: Bookmark your zone's referral instructions in your browser for easy reference. These instructions are updated as specialties join the FAST program.

Are referral instructions the same for every Zone?

No. The FAST program worked with specialists in every Zone to determine the best zonal referral process. While most specialties have chosen to partner with FAST across the province, others opted to continue established processes for direct referrals. Consult the zonal [Referral Instructions](#) for referral processes in your zone.

Do I need to use the FAST Referral Form to submit a referral to FAST?

No. Referring providers have the option to submit referrals using the FAST Referral Form or a referral letter stating a detailed referral reason.

See provincial FAST Referrals Forms below. Additional zone-specific forms may be on the [Referral Instructions](#).



FAST Referral Forms:

[General Surgery](#) | [Gynecology](#) | [Neurosurgery](#) | [Oral Maxillofacial Surgery](#) | [Otolaryngology](#) | [Orthopedics](#) | [Plastic Surgery](#) | [Urology](#) | [Vascular Surgery](#)

What information do I need to attach to the referral?

FAST has standardized referral requirements across the province. Please consult the Referral Pathways available on [Alberta's Pathway Hub](#). Referral Pathways are linked on the [Referral Instructions](#) and the [Alberta Referral Directory](#).

Can I specify a specialist on the referral?

Yes. The referring provider can assign the referral in three ways: To a specific surgeon in the zone, to a surgeon out-of-zone, or to the next-available provider with the shortest wait time.

If I choose a next available surgeon, how are they chosen?

FAST assigns referrals to the next available surgeon based on data collected from surgeon's offices. When surgeons join FAST, they submit data about their existing wait lists and their capacity to accept new referrals. This data is collected in the "Next Available Surgeon Tool" used by FAST to distribute referrals to specialist offices.

What happens after FAST receives the referral?

Once the Zone FAST Team receives your referral, the team:

- Enters the referral into Alberta Netcare eReferral for tracking and referral management;
- Checks to see if the referral has been submitted by multiple referring providers (duplicates);
- Checks to see if the referral includes all the mandatory information listed on the [Referral Pathway](#);
- Helps referring providers submit missing information if needed;
- Assigns completed referrals to a surgeon's office for clinical triage.

Where can I see the status of a referral I submitted to FAST?

Referrals submitted to FAST are entered and tracked in Alberta Netcare eReferral. To see the status of a referral, log into Alberta Netcare and use the Clinical Document Viewer (CDV) Tree and/or your My Referrals dashboard to see your patient's electronic health record. Consult this [Quick Reference Guide](#) for details.

To use eReferral, system users need specific Netcare user permissions. Consult the [Netcare Permissions Matrix](#) for more information. For more information on eReferral, visit albertanetcare.ca/learningcentre/eReferral.htm.

What other tools exist to support referring providers in the referral process?

Clinical Pathways are evidence-informed algorithms that help referring providers guide care options for patients with specific health condition. Visit [Alberta's Pathway Hub](#) for find pathways by specialty and/or condition.

How will using FAST change my relationships with surgeons?

Submitting referrals via FAST should not impact your relationships with specialists. FAST is designed to improve access to surgical care and simplify the referral process. If you would like to use a specific surgeon, include their name on the referral so that FAST can direct the referral appropriately.

How does FAST simplify the referral process for my Medical Office Assistants (MOAs) and office staff?

FAST simplifies the referral process by allowing surgical referrals to be submitted via a centralized intake process in each zone and by clarifying mandatory information via [Referral Pathways](#). Staff will also be supported to submit missing information on referrals and track the status of referrals via [Alberta Netcare eReferral](#). If staff have questions or concerns, Zone FAST Teams are available Monday to Friday to offer support.

How does FAST streamline referral processes for surgery?

FAST centralizes referral intake for surgical specialties via one fax number per zone (or one fax number per specialty in Edmonton Zone) and manages referrals via a centralized referral management system called Alberta Netcare eReferral. This centralized approach reduces the risk of misplaced or lost referrals.

RECEIVING REFERRALS VIA FAST – FOR SPECIALISTS

Do I need to join the FAST program to receive referrals via FAST?

No. If the FAST program receives referrals with you as the named specialist, the referral will be distributed to your office if your contact information is known. However, only specialists who join FAST will be assigned referrals using the “Next Available Surgeon Tool”. For more information about joining FAST, jump to the [Joining FAST](#) section.

How does FAST distribute referrals?

FAST assigns referrals based on the referring provider’s preference for a specific provider, an out-of-zone provider, or the next available surgeon. Referrals are checked for completeness before being assigned to a specialist.

Note: If you need to pause referral distribution to your office due to an extended absence, please notify your Zone FAST Team at least one week in advance.

How does FAST determine the next available surgeon?

FAST assigns referrals to the next available surgeon based on data collected from surgeon’s offices. When surgeons join FAST, they submit data about their existing wait lists and their capacity to accept new referrals. This data is collected in the “Next Available Surgeon Tool” used by FAST to distribute referrals to specialist offices.

Data on the “Next Available Surgeon Tool” is collected on an ad-hoc basis by FAST. Specialists are encouraged to contact their Zone FAST Team if they receive too many or too few referrals to update this tool.

What are mandatory referral requirements?

FAST has standardized referral requirements across the province. These standards ensure referrals contain the information you need to accurately triage and book consultations. Please consult the Referral Pathways available on [Alberta’s Pathway Hub](#) to see mandatory referral information by referral reason.

Referral Pathways are co-designed with specialists, primary care providers, and patient and family advisors. Learn more about the [Co-Design Process](#).

What happens after I receive the referral from FAST?

Once FAST distributes referrals to your office, you can triage the referral based on your internal processes. Your team is responsible to communicate directly with the referring provider to share wait list, triage, and appointment information.

Do I need to share referral outcomes with FAST?

Yes. Specialists who receive referrals via FAST must complete monthly reporting. For more information, jump to the [Wait Time Data and Reporting](#) section.

What impact does FAST have on my Medical Office Assistants (MOAs) and office staff?

The FAST program is your referral partner. The FAST team checks referral for completeness and duplication, and assign referrals based to your office based on referring provider preference or the next available surgeon tool. FAST also supports your office to submit referral and consultation data in order to track and update referrals in Alberta Netcare eReferral. For more information, see [Working with FAST](#).

JOINING FAST – FOR SPECIALISTS

How do I join the FAST program?

Surgeons will be invited to join the program through their section lead or surgeon champion several months before a specialty launches on the FAST program. Surgeons will be sent an onboarding package by email that includes information about FAST, a roles and responsibilities summary, and a brief Surgeon Survey to capture their practice preferences and contact information.

What data is collected via the Surgeon Onboarding Form?

The Surgeons Onboarding Form collects essential data, including surgeon and MOA contact information, referral capacity and wait time information, and referral conditions accepted by your office.

This data helps the Zone FAST Team communicate with your office and distribute referrals using the “Next Available Surgeon Tool”. The survey takes less than 10 minutes to complete.

Is joining FAST mandatory for surgeons?

No, participation in FAST is encouraged but not mandatory. Section leads or surgeon champions will be available during the specialty onboarding process to answer questions and help you decide whether joining FAST is best for your practice.

Do I need to sign a format contract to join FAST?

No, there is no legally binding agreement between you and FAST. During the onboarding process, you will be asked to review and agree to the principles of the FAST program and the roles and responsibilities of each partner. These steps set expectations of working together.

How will joining FAST impact my current referral intake process?

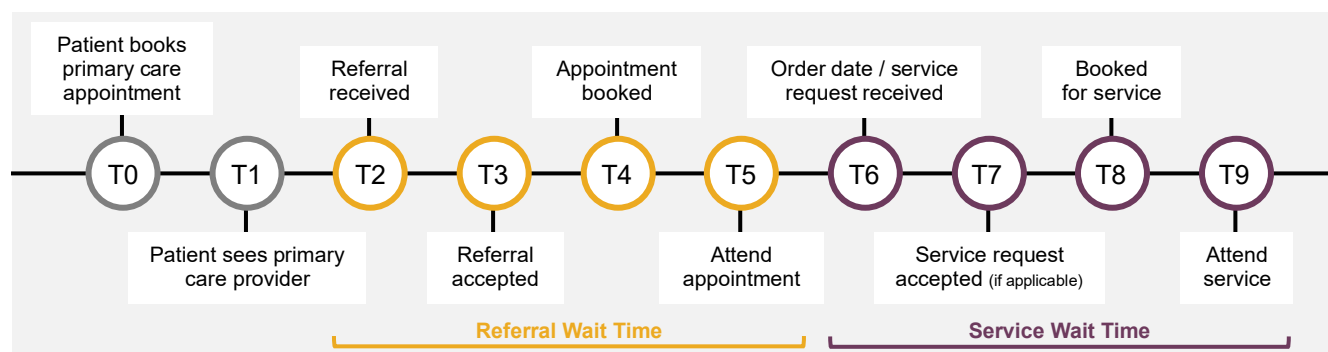
Your office can choose to redirect all referrals via the FAST intake process or continue to accept referrals directly. Referrals accepted through FAST are checked for duplication and for completeness before being assigned to you, thus saving you time and resources collecting missing documentation from referring providers. For more information, see the [Working with FAST](#).

WAIT TIME DATA AND REPORTING

What is wait time data?

The FAST program is focused on the wait time—or duration—between when specialist receives a referral and the patient attends the consultation appointment, as shown by point T2 to T5 in the timestamp diagram below.

Source: [Timestamp \(albertahealthservices.ca\)](https://albertahealthservices.ca/timestamp)



Wait times will differ by specialist depending on the number of referrals they receive, their capacity to see patients, and the complexity of patient concerns. To properly report wait times, the following data must be collected for each referral:

- patient demographics;
- referral acceptance date;
- appointment date and status, i.e. scheduled, attended, cancelled, rescheduled;
- consultation outcome, i.e. follow-up required, no show, non-surgical, surgical.

How does FAST collect wait time data from specialists?

FAST Change Management Coordinators work closely with specialists to determine the best way to collect wait list data on a monthly basis. Collection methods include:

1. EMR: copy FAST on referral letters.
2. EMR: submit EMR reports to FAST.
3. eReferral: enter data into Netcare eReferral.
4. Fax/email: submit a spreadsheet to FAST.

Is wait time data reported publicly?

Not yet. FAST Teams continue to work with specialists to collect wait time data and document referral outcomes in Alberta Netcare eReferral. Once sufficient data is collected, this information will be made publicly available.



CONTACT FAST

How do I contact my Zone FAST Team?

Zone FAST Teams are available Monday to Friday by telephone and email to answer questions about referrals, distribution, and process.

Zone	Telephone	Email
North	1-833-553-3278 ext. 1 M-F: 7:30 AM – 3:45 PM	abfast.north@ahs.ca
Edmonton	1-833-553-3278 ext. 2 M-F: 7:30 AM – 3:45 PM	abfast.edmonton@ahs.ca
Central	1-833-553-3278 ext. 3 M-F: 8:00 AM – 4:15 PM	abfast.central@ahs.ca
Calgary	1-833-553-3278 ext. 4 M-F: 7:30 AM – 3:45 PM	abfast.calgary@ahs.ca
South	1-833-553-3278 ext. 5 M-F: 7:30 AM – 3:45 PM	abfast.south@ahs.ca

Who is part of my Zone FAST Team?

Zone FAST Teams include:

- Manager
- Administrative Clerks – to enter data and ensure completeness
- Registered Nurses – to review referral reasons and urgency, and distribute referrals
- Senior Consultant – to facilitate specialist onboarding to FAST, program implementation, and communication
- Change Management Coordinator – to support specialist data collection and reporting

How can I provide general feedback to FAST?

Please email abfast@ahs.ca.