

Engaging for Excellence: An Advisor's Guide



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Introduction

Thank you for becoming a patient and family advisor volunteer (referred to as advisor within this document) with the Alberta Health Services (AHS), Strategic Clinical Networks™ (SCNs).

At AHS, our aim is to engage with and build the trust of patients and their families. Providing the best service starts with listening to the Albertans we serve. Listening to our advisors ensures we hear the voices of Albertans. As an SCN advisor, your input is valued and respected.

Lived experience is a unique perspective.

- Quote from an SCN advisor

This handbook describes the SCNs and the role you play as an advisor. It also provides a list of resources you can access to support you in your new volunteer advisor role.

What are SCNs?

SCNs create improvements within specific areas of health. They are networks of people, from different backgrounds, who work together to find ways to improve healthcare. This approach offers better quality, outcomes and value for Albertans.

SCNs work with a number of different stakeholders such as patients and families, clinicians, researchers, leaders and community partners to:

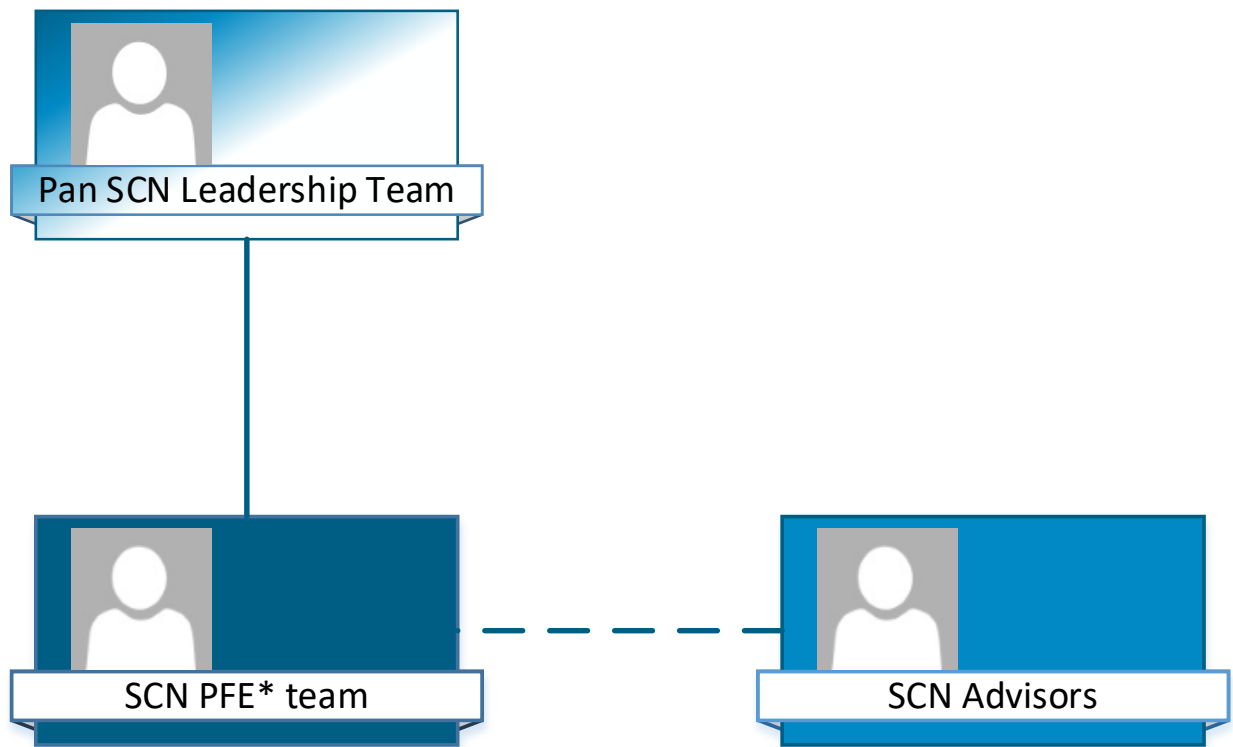
- Identify gaps in the healthcare system
- Develop ways to address these gaps
- Monitor and assess the value of solutions
- Share effective ideas with other healthcare areas

SCNs may focus on a specific area of health (e.g., cancer), cross multiple disease areas (e.g., diabetes, obesity and nutrition) or support specific groups (e.g., Indigenous

health). They may also focus on high-cost, high-use areas (e.g., surgery) or align with provincial programs (e.g., seniors' health)¹. You can learn more about each SCN on the [AHS SCN website](#).

How do advisors fit with the SCNs?

Figure 1: Pan SCN/Advisor working relationship

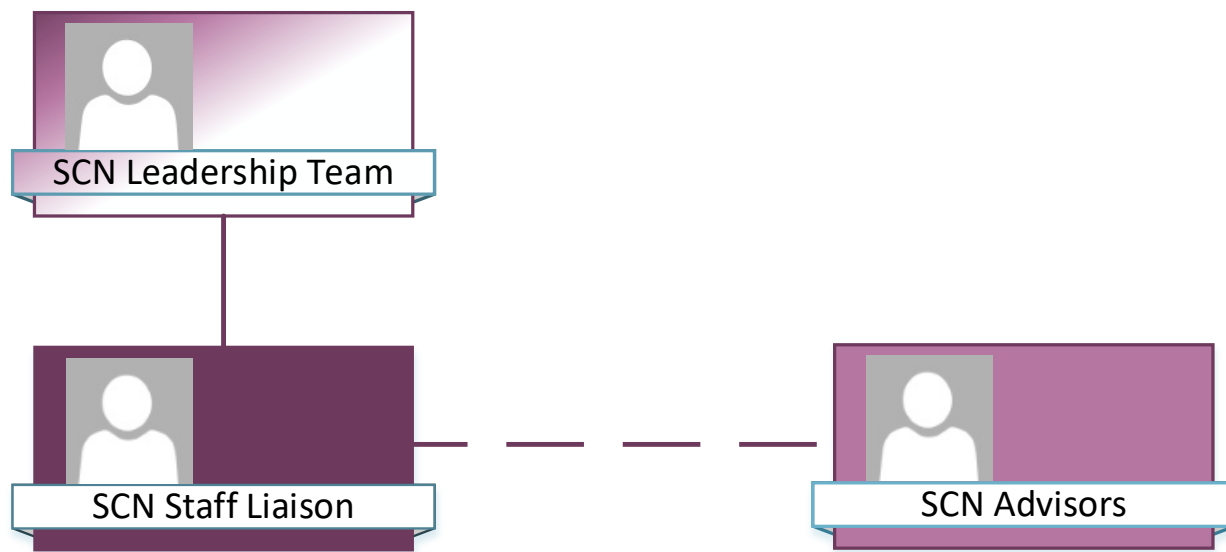


*SCN PFE – Strategic Clinical Networks Patient & Family Engagement team

Legend	
—————	Direct reporting relationship
- - - - -	Supportive relationship

¹ Yiu, V.; Belanger, F. & Todd, K. (2019). Alberta's Strategic Clinical Networks. Enabling health system innovation and improvement. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.191232>

Figure 2: General SCN/Advisor working relationship



Who are SCN advisors?

Advisors are patients or family members who volunteer their time to take part in SCN activities. By sharing insights about their healthcare experience, they bring a unique viewpoint to healthcare planning.

Qualities of a Good Advisor ²	
Has the time and desire to partner with others to improve healthcare	Respects the sensitivity and privacy of information shared
Is open to giving and receiving feedback	Has a sense of humour
Strives to develop oneself and supports others in doing the same	Shares aspects of one’s own experience willingly
Is positive, energetic, and keen	Supports other patient and family advisors

² Alberta Health Services (2019). Engaging for Excellence: A Staff Liaison’s Guide to Best Practice. Retrieved August 4, 2020, from <https://albertahealthservices.ca/assets/about/scn/ahs-scn-perg-staff-liaisons-guide-to-best-practice.pdf>

Qualities of a Good Advisor²

Is passionate about patient- and family-centred care and engagement	Is open to and respectful of the points-of-view others bring
Shares information about their experiences in ways that others can learn	Is flexible and open to trying different approaches

For more information about being an advisor, check out the [Patient and Family Advisor: Roles and Responsibilities](#) webinar.

Why advisors and not advocates?

Advisors inform processes and influence change by sharing their experiences. They do not seek a specific outcome for a particular group but instead share their points of view to build healthcare approaches that are of benefit to all.

Advocates work to meet the needs of a specific group by taking action and sometimes using power to achieve a desired outcome.

Advisory and advocacy roles are both important. However, each role serves a specific purpose and produces a different outcome.

Advisors are better suited to working with multiple stakeholders and viewpoints. Since SCNs need to consider the views of many groups, we look for advisors to work with us.

When a person seeks to inform a process, they share their viewpoint for decision makers to consider (**advisor**).

When a person works to meet the needs of a specific group, they take action, and sometimes use power, in order to achieve a desired outcome (**advocate**).

Why staff can't be advisors?

In November 2018, SCN leadership made the decision not to include current or recent AHS employees as SCN advisors. This includes any person, including physicians, who has worked for AHS in any capacity within the last 12 months.

The reasons for this decision were to:

- Avoid potential conflict of interest for employees acting as SCN advisors
- Reduce power imbalances within meetings in which advisors contribute
- Ensure all advisors are involved as unpaid volunteers
- Increase the voices of the average patient or family member in SCN work

If at any time you become an AHS staff member, you will need to step down from your role as an SCN advisor.

Why is the advisor's voice important?

Research has shown that involving patients and families in healthcare planning results in:

- Greater patient satisfaction
- Increased patient safety
- Decreased hospital re-admission rates
- Fewer hospital-acquired infections
- Shorter lengths of stay
- Increased staff satisfaction and retention
- Improvements in:
 - Work practices
 - Processes
 - Clinical pathways
 - Patient flow ^{3&4}

Be kind to yourself, listen and speak up where you feel that your story and experiences nicely weave into others' experiences.

- Quote from an SCN advisor

³ Fancott, C. (2012). What if: Patients' experiences guided quality improvement and organizational change? Retrieved from: <http://www.cfhi-fcass.ca/Libraries/Collaborations/what-if-quality-improv-E.sflb.ashx>

⁴ Institute for Patient and Family-Centered Care. Transforming health care through partnerships. Retrieved from: <https://www.ipfcc.org/about/pfcc.html>

These are a few reasons why advisors' input and engagement are important to us. Your perspective helps focus SCNs' work around what matters to you as a patient or family member.

How can advisors get involved with SCNs?

An advisor's role can vary depending on their time, interests and experience. As an advisor, you may choose to get involved with SCNs in one or more of the following ways:

- E-Advisor: Providing feedback by email on patient materials, policies and other documents
- Storyteller: Sharing your healthcare story with a group to provide a patient lens and experience
- Occasional involvement: Attending one-time events, such as a focus group or workshop, to add your voice to the SCNs' work
- Regular and ongoing involvement: Making a commitment to being a member of an SCN core committee or working group.

To learn more about the roles and responsibilities of advisors, check out the [Patient and Family Advisors: Roles and Responsibilities](#) webinar.

How do SCNs work with advisors?

Your SCN may ask you to work with them in different ways. SCNs' requests may range from lower levels (e.g., sharing updates or information) to higher levels (e.g., taking part in SCN projects) of engagement.

Some ways SCNs involve advisors are:

- Informing – sharing decisions made or providing updates on work being done
- Consulting – asking for your input in decision-making (SCN leaders make the final decision)
- Collaborating – involving you as equal partners in the SCN's work

Challenge assumptions and ask questions.

- Quote from an SCN advisor

To find out more about how the SCNs may engage with you, visit [International Association for Public Participation \(IAP2\)](#).

How to care for yourself?

As an advisor, you balance your involvement in the SCNs with:

- Personal and family commitments
- Your health and well-being
- The benefits of getting involved in SCN work to yourself or others

Take care of yourself so you don't get overwhelmed.

- Quote from an SCN advisor

Self-care is important! As an advisor, balancing the demands of your personal life with your advisor role could be challenging. It is easy to burnout.

It is okay to say “No” to a request. You are able to take a break from or leave your advisory role at any time. If you choose to step back from your role, please let your staff liaison and the [SCN PFE team](#) know.

Who supports SCN advisors?

There are a few key supports to be familiar with: AHS Volunteer Resources, the SCN PFE team and your SCN staff liaison.

Volunteer Resources

Volunteer Resources (VR) works with AHS departments to connect volunteers with meaningful ways to get involved. Volunteer roles are meant to meet the needs of the program as well as your interests.

VR also maintains information such as volunteer records, hours and statistics for annual reporting and recognition.

To learn more about how VR can support you, contact [AHS Volunteer Resources](#).

The SCN Patient & Family Engagement Team

The SCN PFE team helps you to register as an advisor and to understand your role. This team also works with you to find meaningful ways to get involved with the SCNs. Once you decide which SCN you would like to work with, the team introduces you to the SCN's staff liaison.

In addition, the SCN PFE team:

- Provides opportunities for you to connect with, learn from, and share experiences with other advisors through the [Patient Engagement Reference Group](#) (PERG)
- Shares SCN and AHS communications, updates and opportunities
- Offers day-to-day support to advisors

SCN Staff Liaisons

The SCN staff liaison is your key contact person in the SCN; they support you to engage with your SCN. Your staff liaison provides information on work you may become involved with, introduces you to the team, and helps you understand how the SCN functions.

Staff liaisons may also arrange for your travel, special requests, expense claims, etc., when needed. In some SCNs, another staff member performs these functions. Ask your staff liaison who will provide this support.

If you would like to learn more about the role staff liaisons play in the SCNs, check out the [Engaging for Excellence: A Staff Liaison's Guide to Best Practice](#) and listen to the [Staff Liaisons Roles and Responsibilities](#) webinar.

Always keep lines of communication open and respectful.

- Quote from an SCN advisor

Can advisors claim expenses?

The SCNs try to ensure their advisors do not pay out-of-pocket to take part in SCN-related activities. However, there may be times when you cover an expense and then seek a refund. Be sure to get approval from your SCN before paying an expense; this ensures you will be able to submit a claim. For more information, see [Advisors Out-of-Pocket Expenses](#).

How do advisors submit expense claims?

Submit SCN-specific expenses to your staff liaison or the assigned staff member. Submit PERG-specific expenses to the [SCN PFE Coordinator](#).

What is PERG?

The [Patient Engagement Reference Group \(PERG\)](#) brings advisors together from across the SCNs to:

- Connect and network with each other
- Provide ways for advisors to strengthen their skills
- Consult on SCN projects
- Share and receive information

SCN advisors receive invites to attend PERG meetings. If you prefer not to receive these notices, please contact the [SCN PFE team](#).

What is Patient- & Family-Centred Care?

Patient- and Family-Centred Care (PFCC) is an approach to healthcare that helps define the relationships between healthcare providers, patients, and families. This approach to healthcare delivery views patients and families as essential partners in

healthcare quality and safety².

Patient- and family-centred care leads to better health outcomes, improved patient and family experience of care, better clinician and staff satisfaction, and wiser use of resources².

At AHS, we work towards upholding the four principles of PFCC:

- Dignity and respect
- Information sharing
- Participation
- Collaboration

Patient- and family-centred care is working **with** patients and families, rather than just doing **to** or **for** them.

- Quote from an SCN advisor

For more about PFCC, visit [Institute for Patient- and Family-Centred Care](#).

Are there other resources for advisors?

Understanding our Jargon

At AHS, the use of jargon is common. Although we are trying to reduce this, we often forget. As someone new to the SCN world, you may feel we are speaking a different language. When this occurs, please stop us and ask what we mean.

The resource, [Understanding our Jargon](#), explains some of the words and acronyms that we commonly use.

Patient & Family Advisor Resources

In addition to the resources mentioned earlier, you can find others on the [Patient Engagement in Support of SCNs](#) webpage.

Advisors help us to understand how patients and their families experience the healthcare system. Your voice is important in improving healthcare.

Create a safe place to share sincere, meaningful dialogue.

- Quote from an SCN advisor

We appreciate you sharing your experience and want to help you be comfortable in the role.

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