

Alberta Cancer Diagnosis Initiative (ACD)

SCNergy, Winter 2023

The Cancer Strategic Clinical Network (CSCN) has partnered with people living in Alberta, primary care providers, health system leaders, and community organizations to design a first-of-its-kind provincial cancer diagnosis program.

The [Alberta Cancer Diagnosis \(ACD\) Program](#) will expedite and streamline the diagnostic process, optimize support for people facing cancer diagnosis and those close to them, provide resources and guidance for primary care providers, and ensure ongoing quality improvement to strengthen system efficiencies.



The process of cancer diagnosis relies on complex coordination of care and effective communication among patients, their family members, and care providers. With ACD, people in Alberta can expect decreased delays in diagnosis, fewer late-stage diagnoses, better experience and outcomes, and more optimal use of resources.

Everyone in Alberta has been affected, directly or indirectly through someone close to them, by a cancer diagnosis. One in every two people in Alberta will be diagnosed with cancer, and due to population growth and aging, the number of new cancer diagnoses in the province is expected to increase by 56% within the next 20 years.

From engagement to design

The work to develop the ACD included broad engagement and co-design. Unique by design, the co-design process actively integrates human-centered design, quality improvement, and research approaches.



Central to this work has been purposeful engagement of diverse stakeholders and actively seeking out the voices of people living in Alberta who are often under-represented in co-design of healthcare improvement initiatives. This included conversations with:

- Newcomers
- People living in rural and remote areas
- Young adults
- Older adults
- Indigenous Wellness Core and Indigenous healthcare providers
- Those who identify as LGBTQ2S+
- People living with disabilities
- Those experiencing precarious housing situations

The CSCN heard consistently from patients, caregivers, and health care providers about challenges encountered in the cancer diagnosis process – identifying delays and support as key areas for improvement. The extent of the problem and opportunities for improvement were supported by rigorous evidence generation through an extensive environmental scan, research conducted by the CSCN and published in [peer-reviewed journal articles](#), literature reviews, and the newly released [Future of Cancer Impact Report](#).

Three important guiding principles emerged from these many conversations: **(1)** seeing the whole person, **(2)** building relationships, and **(3)** enabling choice and access.

Transforming Cancer Diagnosis in Alberta

Alberta Health Services (AHS) has successfully designed and implemented active programs for cancer prevention and screening, as well as cancer treatment and follow-up. With ACD, there now exists a transformative opportunity to design a program for cancer diagnosis that will fill an important gap and integrate services within and beyond the health system, connecting with services in the community where patients want to access support.

Funded by Alberta Health and the Alberta Cancer Foundation, and in-kind support received, this work is in close alignment with provincial and national priorities that will result in a one-of-a-kind service that aims to:

- 1) Ensure patients receive the most appropriate diagnostic testing and linkages to community supports to address barriers to diagnosis and/or treatment.
- 2) Help primary care providers expedite cancer diagnosis for individuals with a high likelihood of cancer.
- 3) Coordinate the diagnostic process for patients from emergency departments who present with symptoms potentially related to cancer and who are unable to access a primary care provider; and
- 4) Support appropriate triage to surgery, cancer care for systemic and/or radiation treatment, and/or palliative and supportive care.

The design phase of ACD implementation focused on developing prototypes of specific program elements and testing them with clinicians and operations. Seven prototypes that are currently being developed and tested include:

- Wait time benchmarks.
- Patient and family interface with the program.
- Strategies to expedite core needle biopsies.
- Models of care for patients who do not have a primary care provider.
- Efficient handoff to surgery and cancer care.
- Addressing concerns of those living with frailty and/or other chronic conditions.
- A learning health systems' platform to ensure program evolution and ongoing quality improvement.

The ACD initiative is built on the diverse voices of people living in Alberta and shaped by strong partnerships that will ultimately provide a streamlined and supported cancer diagnosis program.

Meaningful and diverse engagement is a cornerstone of the ACD initiative. Engaging a broad range of clinicians, people, and communities will help design a cancer diagnosis program that is inclusive and meets the needs of providers and people in all Alberta communities.

As this program moves into the implementation phase, the words of one Albertan resonate, *“Ultimately, it gets back to having the ability to deliver client-centered care...it has to do with collaboration, in care and communication. As a patient you long for silos to be broken down...you can't afford not to.”*

To keep up to date on this project, participate in engagement activities, and provide your insights, please visit [Together4Health Alberta Cancer Diagnosis](#). For more information, please contact cancer.scn@ahs.ca