



Primary Care
Alberta

Provincial Pathways Unit - A Journey Through 2024



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Celebrating 2024: Our Year of Growth & Impact

Welcome to the 2024 Year-End Report of the Provincial Pathways Unit (PPU). This year marks another milestone in our commitment to delivering seamless, integrated care through the standardization, coordination, and co-design of clinical, patient, and referral pathways.

Since our establishment over two years ago, the PPU has transformed pathway development across Alberta, centralizing coordination and publication to ensure a consistent, high-quality approach. Previously, pathways were created independently across the health system, *in many* cases, without a standardized framework. Today, the PPU bridges this gap, strengthening collaboration and efficiency. We are excited to share the highlights of 2024 and celebrate our collective achievements.

Empowering Frontline Providers

At the heart of the PPU's mission is a commitment to supporting frontline providers with meaningful, relevant, and practical solutions. By actively engaging with both pathway users and creators, we have built a dedicated team that leads, upholds standards, and implements processes for the co-design, development, standardization, and publication of pathways. In our first year of operation, we focused on establishing the foundational infrastructure needed for efficient pathway development.

Over the past year, we have tested, refined, and continuously improved these processes in real time, ensuring they evolve to meet the needs of providers and patients alike. Our collaborative approach, involving physicians, patient partners, and healthcare partners, has been instrumental in shaping pathways that are practical, effective, and aligned with the needs of primary care providers across Alberta.

Aligning with Alberta's Healthcare Vision

The **Modernizing Alberta's Primary Health Care System (MAPS) Report**, launched in 2023, set out recommendations to improve patient access to high-quality primary care and build a more integrated system for the long term. Specialty access programs - such as advice and pathways - play a crucial role in guiding patients as they transition between their medical home, specialty care, and back again.

As part of this vision, the PPU has consistently exceeded its performance targets, developing new pathways each quarter to support the MAPS initiative. Through our efforts, we are not only improving access to specialty care but also strengthening the foundation for a more coordinated and patient-centered healthcare system in Alberta.

Key Achievements of 2024

Expanding & Enhancing Pathways

In 2024, the PPU successfully led the development and optimization of 30 clinical and patient pathways, marking a significant achievement in improving healthcare access and decision-making.



Additionally, in collaboration with patient and family advisors, the PPU developed patient-focused provincial pathways for 12 clinical conditions. These pathways serve as vital resources, complementing clinical pathways by providing clear, accessible information to empower patients in managing their health.

Embracing Adaptability: Innovating Pathway Development While Staying True to Co-Design

The PPU pioneered a rapid design process to create a Measles Pathway in response to an increase in cases in Alberta. This innovative approach allowed us to quickly develop a crucial resource, demonstrating our ability to efficiently address high-priority needs without compromising quality. Similarly, we applied this method to a suite of pathways for Hand and Wrist conditions, with a goal to contribute to efficient management of increased referrals and reducing specialist wait times.

Noteworthy Pathways

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS):

The PCOS pathway has generated a lot of interest and positive feedback amongst patients, primary care physicians and multiple types of specialists.

“...Grateful for the collaboration with the PPU, for their dedication in the timely creation of pathways, and for their exceptional skill in listening and in guiding the facilitation of our input”.

The PCOS primary care clinical and patient pathway improves diagnosis, management, and care of PCOS and its associated health risks. Patient partners expressed gratitude for being involved in the co-design process, contributing their lived experiences. The commitment to a truly multidisciplinary co-design process added complexity, which resulted in a high quality and comprehensive end product that is being embraced by all partners.

This pathway has been highlighted in poster presentations at numerous local, national and international conferences throughout 2024 and into 2025.

Key Achievements of 2024

Noteworthy Pathways Continued

Male Lower Urinary Tract Symptoms (LUTS):

Having primary care physicians and specialists involved in the codesign process, has enabled the PPU team to increase their awareness of the workflow in a clinic and how a physician would access a pathway during their consultation with a patient. The LUTS pathway exemplifies this, and we heard recently from a primary care physician that *“these types of pathways are a goldmine for learning how to navigate the healthcare system”*.

Another reflected on how the complex information embedded into the design of our pathways is condensed and easily consumed because *“the knowledge in the pathways cannot be easily found in a textbook”* and this is of particularly high value to busy primary care physicians. For the LUTS pathway, because of increased demand for Urologists, we heard this pathway has helped facilitate system flow and reduce administrative burden.

“As a family doctor, it is hard to handle our urgent cases that are just waiting to get past the bottleneck. These pathways are a simple-to-use, wide-reaching solution that I have shared with my colleagues, residents, and medical students... we all think they are invaluable! It is also helpful to have a resource to point patients to, if they have more questions.”

We have also heard from many specialists about the value of the process to develop the pathway as well as having a tool to be able to share with primary care physicians, when suggesting clinical management steps that can be undertaken in the patient medical home, which can sometimes result in avoidance of a referral altogether.

“The pre-work was comprehensive and appropriate, and I was impressed by the process and the ease with which progress was made.”



The Hub: A Centralized Solution for Pathway Access

Our one-stop solution for accessing evidence-informed, co-designed clinical, patient, and referral pathways has been operational for over a year, and user data is showing promising results. Providers appreciate having a single, reliable source for accessing pathways in Alberta, with a standardized look and feel that enhances usability. This consistency makes it easier for healthcare professionals to trust and rely on the Hub, reinforcing its role as an essential resource in clinical practice.



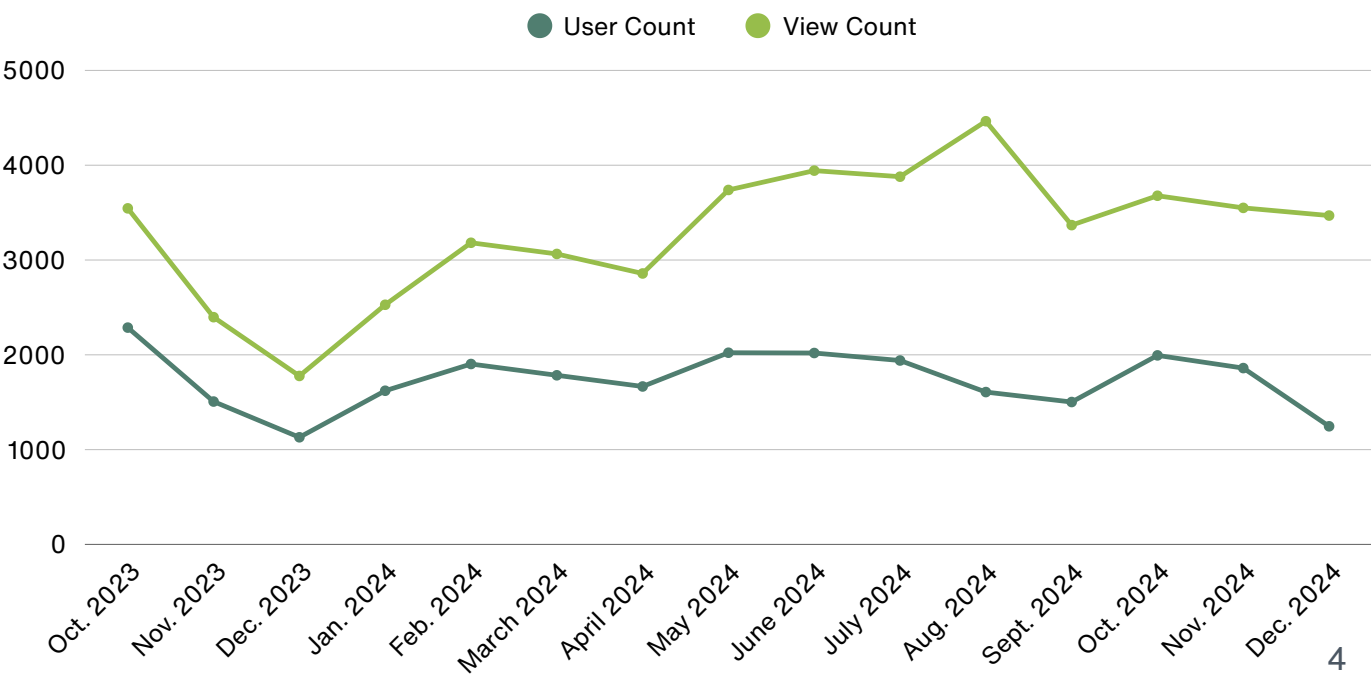
Alberta’s Pathway Hub is showing growing utilization throughout the province. Web analytics demonstrates that the Hub is being accessed across Alberta and nationwide.

Hub utilization by the numbers:

- In 2024, the Hub has been accessed 41,722 times.
- Monthly access is growing with a 36 per cent increase between the first and second half of 2024.



Frequency of Landing Page Access



Most Accessed Clinical Pathways

The PPU monitors pathway utilization across Alberta, both provincially and by zone.

Tracking the most frequently accessed clinical pathways provides valuable insight into their impact on primary care and helps identify emerging needs.

This data informs the prioritization of future pathway development, ensuring we continue to support frontline providers in managing the most relevant and high-demand conditions.

The most accessed pathways in 2024 were:

- Q1: Non-Obstructing Kidney Stones
- Q2: Celiac Disease
- Q3: Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
- Q4: Abnormal Uterine Bleeding

By leveraging this data, the PPU can refine its approach to pathway development, ensuring continued alignment with provider and patient needs.

PPU Key Indicators: Pathway Co-Design Satisfaction

Throughout 2024, the PPU remained committed to enhancing the co-design process by actively seeking feedback from participants. After each pathway is developed, we invite co-design contributors - including primary and specialty care providers, as well as patient and family advisors - to share their insights.

This ongoing evaluation helps us refine our approach and ensure a meaningful experience for all involved. A survey conducted among 21 participants engaged in various pathways reflected high levels of satisfaction with the co-design process, reinforcing the value of collaboration in pathway development.

- 100% of survey respondents indicated they agree or strongly agree that the codesign team included the right partners.
- 100% of survey respondents indicated they agree or strongly agree that the team consider how the pathway incorporates the needs of different regions throughout Alberta.
- 100% of survey respondents said they would participate in the PPU's codesign process again.

Note: All quarterly charts are [here](#).



MyHealth Alberta: Enhancing Patient Access to Pathways

Patient pathways are accessible through the Pathway Hub for providers and are also available on the trusted patient resource website, MyHealthAlberta.ca. To support patient understanding and engagement, each pathway is offered in two formats: a single-page algorithm that mirrors the clinical pathway and a full, detailed version with expanded information.

We know, from MyHealth Alberta analytics, there is a clear preference for the full version, with a 2:1 ratio of users selecting the more detailed format. This insight reinforces the importance of providing comprehensive information to empower patients in managing their health effectively.

Impact of Pathways on Referral Patterns

For specialties participating in the Facilitated Access to Specialized Treatment (FAST) program, data analytics are providing new insights into how referral patterns change after pathways are developed for common conditions that are frequently referred to specialty care for further management. This data offers valuable insights into how pathways influence clinical decision-making and helps refine strategies for promoting and integrating them into practice.

While data collection efforts are still expanding, there is growing excitement about the potential to shape clinical behaviors through pathway adoption. By providing clear, evidence-based guidance, pathways have the potential to optimize referral processes, manage demand for specialty services, and enhance overall system efficiency.

Example: Non-Obstructing Kidney Stones (NOKS)

The Non-Obstructing Kidney Stone pathway has been actively promoted by the Urology group in Edmonton since its release. After a full year of implementation, data indicates a 26.6 per cent decrease in NOKS referrals between 2023 and 2024. While it is challenging to establish a direct causal relationship, early trends suggest that active promotion plays a key role in influencing referral patterns. As data collection continues, these insights will help refine pathway implementation strategies, ensuring they are effectively integrated into clinical workflows to support both providers and patients.

Growth and Partnerships: Clinician Engagement

The success of the PPU's pathway work throughout 2024 is a result of the leadership and dedication of clinical champions. Looking ahead, building capacity for more clinicians to engage in pathway development remains a priority. The PPU is committed to expanding partnerships with physicians, nurse practitioners, and all providers to refine our co-design processes and implementation methods. This work will continue strengthening collaboration to enhance pathway effectiveness, integration, and ultimately improve patient care and system efficiency.



Patients: The Power of Partnership

The PPU has had the privilege of collaborating with 16 Patient and Family Advisors (PFAs) to co-design patient pathways that align seamlessly with clinical pathways. Their invaluable insights have helped shape pathways that are truly patient-centered, ensuring they are clear, accessible, and meaningful.

The feedback from our PFAs has been overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the impact of inclusive collaboration:

“...a deeply meaningful and empowering experience with explicit acknowledgement and appreciation that everyone’s voice was treated as equal.”

“...provided space for PFAs to truly represent their community and highlight the power of what is possible when teams come together with patients as partners to truly collaborate.”

These testimonials reinforce the importance of patient engagement in pathway development, and we are excited to continue fostering these vital partnerships to improve healthcare for all.

Enhancing Efficiency in Pathway Co-Design

In 2024, the PPU has made significant strides in streamlining the pathway co-design and development process. By refining our approach, we have improved efficiency, consistency, and collaboration, ensuring that pathways are developed effectively while maximizing the capacity of both PPU team members and co-design partners.

Our ability to facilitate and guide co-design teams has been widely recognized, with partners noting the seamless process and strong facilitation skills that enable pathways to be completed within a three-month timeframe or less.

“I was impressed by the process and the ease with which progress was made.”

This ongoing commitment to efficiency allows the PPU to respond quickly to emerging needs while maintaining the high standards and collaborative approach that define our work.

Exciting Times Ahead for the PPU!

As the PPU transitions to Primary Care Alberta, we are entering a new chapter filled with exciting opportunities for growth, collaboration, and innovation! The year ahead promises to be one of transformation as we continue to evolve in partnership with providers, patients, and healthcare leaders across Alberta.

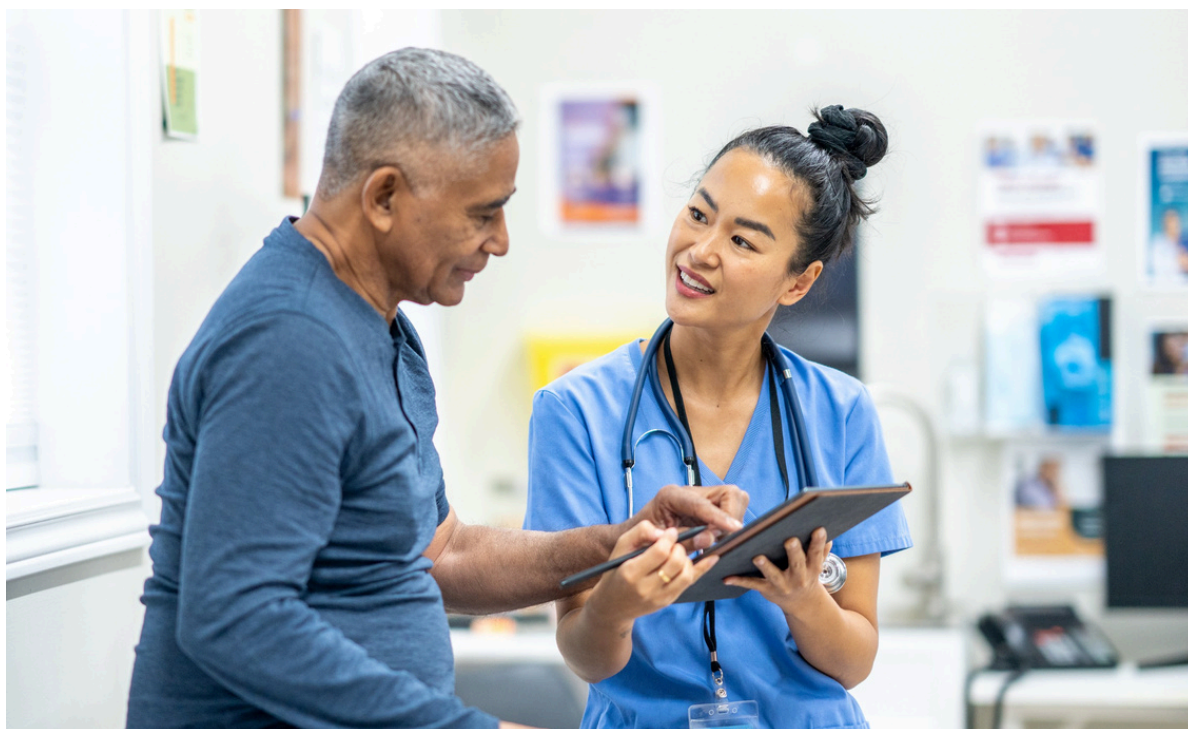
A Digital Evolution is Coming

We've been listening! Based on valuable feedback from primary care providers, we've been hard at work optimizing Alberta's Pathway Hub to enhance usability and reduce administrative burden. Our focus is on creating a seamless, efficient experience that truly supports frontline providers.

Expanding Pathways for Better Primary Care

The PPU is actively developing new pathways to further strengthen primary care across Alberta, ensuring that all Albertans—no matter where they live—have access to care that is supported by high quality tools and integrated referral processes. By improving accessibility and consistency, we are helping to create a more connected, efficient, and patient-centered healthcare system.

Stay tuned—big things are coming in 2025! We can't wait to share what's next as we take pathway development, accessibility, and impact to the next level!



Questions? Contact us.

albertapathways@primarycarealberta.ca
www.albertapathways.ca



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