



## STANDARDIZING BREAST HEALTH

Standardized requirements published for all breast health referrals in Alberta

For just over a year, representatives of Alberta's breast health programs have been meeting with primary care and the AHS Alberta Referral Pathways team. The working group has been developing referral guidelines and associated requirements for any referral to a breast health care centre.

Common referrals to a breast health centre may include suspicious findings after a general breast exam, diagnostic imaging, or a family history of breast cancer. The breast health working group has determined the referral process for each reason for referral and the mandatory information required for triage. Referring clinicians now have all the information needed to make a quality referral to any breast health program in Alberta, including emergency, contact, and inclusion information.

Dr. Margaret Churcher, the Calgary-based family physician who led the group as the clinical champion, says she was motivated to participate in the Alberta Referral Pathways for Breast Health project through a commitment to cancer and primary care in general. "Anything that will potentially assist in improving patient care - as well as assisting physicians in providing referrals – will ultimately result, in my opinion, in more timely and appropriate access for patients and better outcomes."

In the past, the breast health referral process wasn't always easy to navigate, and referrals would sometimes be incomplete or inappropriate for the service requested. "It is a challenge to get useful information through to those receiving referrals, and at the same time

have the referral process be user-friendly for clinic administrative staff – who are ultimately the people tasked with sending the referrals," comments Alanna Dukes, who is a nurse navigator for the Clinical Breast Health Program at Red Deer Regional Hospital Centre. "We

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*- Dr. Margaret Churcher, Family Physician*

had just started sending breast cancer referrals to the cancer centres via Alberta Netcare eReferral, and could see the advantages of an electronic referral platform."

[eReferral](#) requires standard information for each reason for referral request, and checks the eReferral for completeness before the referral is sent. Standardized referral information for services not yet on eReferral improves the efficiency and quality of patient referrals, and is a giant leap towards automation.

Standard referral guidelines benefit both the sending and receiving provider. "The breast programs will benefit by not having to waste time and resources dealing with inappropriate referrals," Alanna explains, "and family physician offices will benefit by having one place to look for the appropriate place to send any breast related referral. It's a win – win."

[Download](#) the Breast Health Referral Quick Reference, and visit [www.ahs.ca/pathways](http://www.ahs.ca/pathways) for more information.