



Family Presence: Overview for Staff

What is family presence?

Family presence is the mindset, practice, and support systems in place that ensures designated family / support person(s) are involved as essential partners in care, and welcomed to participate and collaborate with health care providers in providing safe and quality health care services to patients whenever the patient desires.

What is the goal of family presence?

To ensure a welcoming environment that enables designated family/support persons to be present to partner in patient care. Designated family/support persons are not visitors, they have a role as essential members of the care team.

How do we engage families as partners in care?

- Create a welcoming environment for designated family/support persons to be partners.
- Discuss opportunities for partnership and participation, early on and with ongoing review.
- Discuss with the patient if they would like their designated family/support persons present during care/procedures, discussions and decisions.
- Ensure designated family/supports are prepared and understand what they may observe.

Are children welcome to visit?

Children are integral members of a patient's family and are encouraged to spend time with their loved ones. Children must be able to care for their own needs or supervised by an adult other than the patient.



Can designated family/support persons have access around the clock?

Wherever possible, designated family/support persons are welcome to be present 24 hours a day, seven days a week at AHS facilities. For designated family/support persons wanting to stay overnight, look to make the family as comfortable as possible and collaborate to determine options for where and when patient and designated family/support person can physically be together.

Why are we encouraging 24-hour family presence?

“Isolating patients at their most vulnerable time, from the people who know them best, places them at risk for medical error, emotional harm, inconsistencies in care, lack of preparedness for the transitions of care, and unnecessary costs. Yet in many hospitals and health systems, outdated visiting policies still separate families and other loved ones during hospital stays.”

(Institute for Patient and Family-Centered Care, Better Together campaign, ipfcc.org)



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What about Infection prevention?

- Designated family/support persons should wash their hands and wear Personal Protective Equipment as appropriate.
- Encourage designated family/support persons that are unwell to visit when they are feeling better.
- When access is restricted, provide virtual communication alternatives (for example, phone call, video chat), and keep family involved through routine updates.
- Encourage designated family/support persons to review the [Knowing your Risks, Roles and Responsibilities](#) brochure.

“Families want to be meaningful participants... families are the true experts... and the expertise they bring to the discussion is just as valuable as the other experts in the circle of care.”
- Patient Advisor

Did You Know?

AHS has a [Family Presence: Designated Family/Support Person and Visitor Access Policy Suite](#) available on Insite.

What if the designated family/support persons are disruptive or act in a manner that is dangerous to staff or patients?

Safety for staff, patients and families in care remain AHS' top priority. Behaviour from designated family/support persons and/or visitors that is disruptive, disrespectful or infringes upon others' rights or safety should be addressed as soon as possible.

- Involve managers
- Involve Protective Services
- Follow the implementation of limits guidance
- Share with all involved and document

Designated family/support persons help by:

- Empowering patients to complete care independently and transition care more smoothly.
- Answer questions, provide history/context, identify goals and reduce barriers.
- Provide emotional support for patients reducing responsive behaviours, depression and anxiety.
- Increase satisfaction for patient and families.
- Reduce falls and subsequent injuries.
- Improve treatment adherence and discharge outcomes.

Adapted from Health PEI and Health Excellence Canada Better Together

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