

Virtual Home Hospital

Frequently Asked Questions for Healthcare Providers

Alberta Health Services' (AHS) Virtual Home Hospitals allow us to meet the healthcare needs of more Albertans by reducing a patient's length of stay in a physical hospital or preventing admission to one by moving patient care into their home or other safe location where they choose to receive care.

Physicians play an important role in identifying patients who could be referred to a Virtual Home Hospital. Each Virtual Home Hospital has developed patient criteria to assist you in determining if Virtual Home Hospital is a good fit for your patient.

This resource is for physicians and healthcare providers who may want to refer a patient to a Virtual Home Hospital.

About Virtual Home Hospital

Which zones have Virtual Home Hospitals?

- There are currently Virtual Home Hospitals in:
 - Edmonton Zone – available to all sites in the Edmonton area
 - Calgary Zone – available at Rockyview General Hospital and South Health Campus.
- AHS is planning expansion of Virtual Home Hospitals to all five zones.

How is healthcare delivered through the Virtual Home Hospital?

- Virtual Home Hospital care teams (e.g., physicians, nurses, pharmacists, etc.) provide acute patient care through virtual care technologies (e.g., Zoom and digital remote patient monitoring) and in-person facility visits, if needed.
- The care team works closely with community healthcare providers, such as community paramedics and Home Care, to coordinate and deliver hands-on care in a patient's home, if they need it.
- Patients are monitored closely by the physician-supervised care team through digital remote patient monitoring, using digital devices such as a blood pressure cuff, pulse oximeter and heart rate monitor, weigh scale and thermometer.
- Some patients require more hands-on care in their home, while others can have most of the care managed virtually.

What kind of healthcare is provided in a Virtual Home Hospital?

- The scope of care available at a specific Virtual Home Hospital varies. Each program, like a unit in our hospital facilities, care for a certain scope of patients based on their diagnoses, clinical needs, attending physician groups and other variables.
- Programs currently offered through Virtual Home Hospitals are:
 - Medicine (Calgary, Edmonton)
 - Cardiology (Edmonton)
 - Neurology (Edmonton)

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- General Surgery (Edmonton)
- Orthopedic Surgery (Edmonton)
- Cardiovascular Surgery (Edmonton)
- Women's Health (Edmonton)
- The type of care a patient receives includes:
 - Frequent virtual assessments by our care team.
 - In-person assessments at home by community paramedics, nurses or allied health providers and in-person visits at a facility when required.
 - IV medications (PICC line is not required), oxygen, medication management.
 - Inpatient priority access to laboratory services, diagnostic imaging and procedures.

Who is part of a Virtual Home Hospital care team?

- A patient's care team will include physicians, nurses, pharmacists and may include nurse practitioners, community paramedics and other medical specialists or healthcare workers they may need. Their family physician will also be updated and stay informed about their patient's care.
- Patients may also have family or a caregiver at home that will be considered part of their care team.

How does Virtual Home Hospital differ from Home Care?

- Virtual Home Hospital provides acute care to patients in their home, allowing a patient to leave the hospital early and possibly even avoiding admission to hospital altogether.
- If a patient requires hands-on support in their home, we partner with community providers like community paramedics and Home Care.
- If a patient is decompensating, our care teams can urgently respond by sending the community paramedics out to see the patient.
- Home Care is a type of continuing care service that provides support for people with medical needs so they can live in their own homes or communities for as long as possible. However, they don't provide the same hospital-level acute care services that VHH does.

Are Virtual Home Hospitals safe for patients?

- Yes. Virtual Home Hospitals have been safely operating in Alberta since 2018, and around the world for much longer.
- We will make sure that patients meet specific health criteria before they're accepted into our care.
- Each of our programs have thorough safety protocols to ensure patients and their caregivers have a direct line to their care team during operational hours if they have questions about their health or the care being provided.

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Referring patients to Virtual Home Hospital

Who can refer a patient to a Virtual Home Hospital?

- Any physician or nurse practitioner caring for a patient can refer patients to us. We receive patients as a direct admission from acute care or emergency department, or by referral from an ambulatory or community specialty or primary care clinic.

How do I refer a patient?

- Healthcare providers should refer to the [Alberta Referral Directory](#) for the referral process for the Virtual Home Hospital in your area.
- Non-Connect Care sites can use a [generic referral form](#).

What type of patient should be referred to Virtual Home Hospital?

- Each Virtual Home Hospital has developed patient criteria to assist physicians in determining if Virtual Home Hospital is a good fit for a particular patient. You can find this information in the Alberta Referral Directory or by contacting your specific Virtual Home Hospital.
- In addition to those specific characteristics, patients must:
 - be at least 18 years old and able to consent to being treated at home,
 - be able to communicate by phone or computer (language interpretation/translation are available) and are open to using technology,
 - be engaged and willing to participate in their care,
 - be functionally able to be in their home (e.g., home is set-up to accommodate them), and
 - if necessary, have adequate support in place at home, such as having a caregiver.

How do Virtual Home Hospitals benefit patients?

- Our patients can safely receive acute care at home instead of the hospital, meaning they can continue their care while sleeping in their own bed and eating their own food.
- They also experience increased mobility and independence, increased satisfaction with their care and a lower risk of complications that may be more likely to occur in a hospital setting.

Why should I refer patients to a Virtual Home Hospital?

- Beyond the benefits to the patient, Virtual Home Hospitals help increase capacity in our acute care system and decrease emergency department visits and readmissions.
- They can also help reduce a patient's length of stay in a hospital. These are all important for the sustainability of our healthcare system.

How will I receive updates regarding my patient's care?

- When your patient is admitted to Virtual Home Hospital you will either be the referring physician or be notified of admission by the admitting physician. Our team will work with you to support the transition of patient care.
 - If you are a patient's primary care provider, you will be invited to be part of the care team.
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For more information

Edmonton Zone:

- Phone: 1-888-604-0499
- Email: EZVH@ahs.ca

Calgary Zone:

- **South Health Campus:**
 - Phone: 403-956-4455 ext. 1
 - Email: CGYVirtualHomeHospital.SHC@ahs.ca
- **Rockyview General Hospital:**
 - Phone: 403-943-3344 ext. 1
 - Email: CGYVirtualHomeHospital.RGH@ahs.ca