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Health Link Alberta expands nutrition, medication support

EDMONTON/CALGARY – Albertans are now able to talk to medication specialists and registered dietitians about their nutrition and medication concerns through Health Link Alberta.

The province's 24-hour health advice and information line is now directing callers with concerns about medications to information specialists at the Poison and Drug Information Service (PADIS). These individuals can respond to questions beyond the scope of the registered nurses who routinely provide callers with health advice.

Callers with complex nutrition questions and concerns will have the option of having a registered dietitian call them back to provide more specialized information and advice.

"These are both great additions to Health Link Alberta," says Lara Osterreicher, Director of Health Link Alberta Operations. "Both medication management and nutrition can significantly impact our overall health. If we can give better access to information and advice in these areas, it will go a long way in improving the health of Albertans and building healthier communities."

To access the medication or nutrition services, callers can contact Health Link Alberta as usual, speak to a registered nurse about their health concerns and, if required, connect the caller to a PADIS information specialist or make the request to have a dietitian follow up.

PADIS medical director Dr. Mark Yarema says the increasing number of prescription medications and alternative therapies such as herbal products means it's important to help Albertans make informed choices about their use.

"Our information specialists at PADIS can answer questions about using medications and herbal products when you are pregnant, breastfeeding, or worried that you might be having an adverse reaction after using them. The service is free, confidential and available 24/7," he says. "We're very proud to partner with Health Link Alberta to provide this important service."

AHS Nutrition Services manager Stephanie Moriartey says having nutrition support through Health Link Alberta will help Albertans get the resources they need.

"We are thrilled to be able to support callers across the province and help more Albertans access dietitians for their complex nutrition questions," she says.

Common nutrition concerns include infant and toddler eating; allergies; supplements, and intolerances to certain foods. Dietitians can provide referral information for local community resources should callers require additional support.

Staffed by registered nurses and other health care providers, Health Link Alberta offers a toll-free telephone service to all Albertans 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with local numbers in Calgary (403-943-5465) and Edmonton (780-408-5465) and a toll-free number (1-866-408-5465) for all other areas of the province.

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More than 950,000 Albertans called Health Link Alberta last year and more than 10 million calls have been received since the service launched in 2000. Of those callers needing medical advice, registered nurses were able to provide self-care information to almost half of them so they could care for themselves or their loved ones at home.

It's estimated about 350 Albertans avoid a trip to an emergency department every day, thanks to advice they received from Health Link Alberta.

“These stats show us what a huge impact Health Link Alberta has on relieving pressure from other parts of the health system and supporting Albertans in getting the right care at the right time by the most appropriate provider,” says Osterreicher.

In addition to providing health advice, Health Link Alberta supports a variety of other services, including helping Albertans find health services, interpreting calls in 120 languages, sending via email health information on infant growth and development to new parents, and developing and approving health content for www.MyHealth.Alberta.ca.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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