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Accessing trusted health advice now as easy as 8-1-1

Alberta Health Services introduces new telephone number for Health Link

EDMONTON/CALGARY – Getting trusted health advice around the clock just got simpler with the introduction of the 811 phone number for Health Link, Alberta’s free, 24/7 health information and advice line.

The new number replaces the existing 10-digit local numbers in Calgary and Edmonton as well as the provincewide toll-free number. The old numbers will continue to direct callers to Health Link for the time being. In a medical emergency, Albertans should continue to dial 911 or visit the nearest emergency department.

“Health Link is an invaluable service that gives Albertans across the province telephone access to registered nurses and other health professionals,” said the Honourable Sarah Hoffman, Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors. “By changing Health Link’s number to 811, access to experienced, responsive health advice will be even easier. This is the kind of universal, accessible, public health care delivery that Albertans expect and depend on.”

Health Link supported more than one million Albertans last year, often preventing unnecessary trips to the emergency department. Of those who called with a health concern, nearly half (48 per cent) were given advice to care for themselves at home, 36 per cent were told to visit their doctor or another health care provider and just 16 per cent were advised to go to the emergency department.

Health Link staff provide advice and navigation services via telephone free of charge as well as online health information to the public through MyHealth.Alberta.ca.

“We are very pleased to be able to offer 811 dialling for Health Link,” said Vickie Kaminski, Alberta Health Services President and CEO. “We know this service has a huge impact on improving the health of Albertans. Health Link provides caring and trusted advice, connecting people to the right care by the right provider at right time and place. It also helps reduce pressures on other parts of the health system, such as emergency departments.”

Several other provinces, including B.C. and Saskatchewan, also use 811 for access to non-urgent health care services. Alberta’s adoption of 811 will create consistency for those travelling to and from neighbouring provinces.

For first-time mother Carrie Meanley, the advice of a Health Link nurse may have saved her life and the life of her newborn daughter, Anna.

“During my pregnancy, I was having abdominal pain but I didn’t want to have to go to the emergency if I didn’t have to,” said Meanley. “Being a first-time mom, I needed advice and the Health Link nurse was so comforting and helpful.”

After asking a series of questions, the nurse advised the 32-year-old Calgarian to visit her nearest emergency department. After testing at the hospital, she was diagnosed with HELLP syndrome, a potentially fatal condition.

“I had to have an emergency C-section and it’s possible that my daughter Anna or I would not be here today if it weren’t for the advice we got from Health Link,” says Meanley.

Similarly, 44-year-old Kathrin Sierra from Edmonton has praise for the Health Link nurse who helped her.

“I was having trouble walking and I decided I would call Health Link for advice,” said Sierra, who frequently recommends Health Link to family and friends. “The nurse was great and asked lots of questions. In the end, she thought I needed to go to the emergency department.”

Through further testing in hospital, a spinal tumour was discovered and Sierra was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma.

“If I had waited any longer, I probably would have been paralyzed,” said Sierra, who has since beat cancer twice.

Both Sierra and Meanley said they have called Health Link numerous other times with less urgent health concerns, often regarding their kids, and always get the advice they need.

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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