



CPSA Continuity of Care Standard: AFTER-HOURS SUPPORT & HEALTH LINK

Frequently Asked Questions

1. ***Will Health Link provide after-hours coverage for my patients if I have an agreement in writing?***

Health Link will work in partnership with you and your clinical group to triage calls from your patients to your on-call physician outside regular office hours. You must have a designated on-call physician to meet the CPSA's requirements for such an arrangement.

2. ***What requirements do I need to meet to have an after-hours arrangement with Health Link?***

You will need to organize into large clinical groups, provide one point of contact for Health Link staff (voicemail box, pager number) and a current list of physicians in your group that your staff updates regularly.

3. ***Can a solo physician or small clinic have an after-hours arrangement with Health Link?***

Physicians will need to work within a large group. Examples of such a group are Primary Care Networks (PCNs) and zone specialty groups.

4. ***Do I have to use Health Link to provide after-hours continuity of care for my patients?***

Health Link is one option. It is your choice to determine what is best for you and your patients.

5. ***Will Health Link send all calls from my patients to me after-hours?***

Health Link nurses will triage callers as they currently do to determine if the caller needs immediate medical attention. They will only refer those callers who fit the emergent triage category (be seen in 0-4 hours) where it is not clear that an Emergency Department/Urgent Care visit is required. In the case of specialists, Health Link will send callers who fit predetermined criteria that your clinical group has agreed upon to the on-call physician.

6. ***Do I have to help Health Link develop triage protocols?***

If your clinical group wishes Health Link to provide specific advice or triage specific issues then we will work you to enhance our current protocols. Health Link is a provincial service, supporting callers from across the province and therefore, any clinical protocol changes that are developed would apply to callers from across the province and must be approved by your clinical group provincially. This applies mainly to specialists (e.g. post operative, post procedure).

7. ***How many calls will I get from Health Link after-hours?***

Probably not many. As an example, the Calgary Foothills PCN, which is comprised of about 250 physicians, received 60 calls to the on-call physician from Health Link in the past year. That's a little more than 1 call per week.

8. ***What time of day are most of the calls?***

Most calls come during daytime and evening hours.

9. ***Will Health Link manage critical lab results after-hours?***

Health Link nurses do not manage test results. Their role is to triage symptoms and provide self-care advice. They do not have access to Netcare or other EMRs.

10. ***Are there other options for after-hours care besides an on-call program?***

Yes. Some PCNs have after-hours clinics that Health Link can refer callers to. This is a very successful program and well received by patients. Last year, over 8000 patients from Calgary Foothills PCN were referred to the Access 365 Clinic by Health Link. Based on their survey data, about 4500 ED/UCC visits were prevented last year by the Access 365 Clinic. Health Link is happy to work with you to refer callers to an after-hours clinic.

11. ***How will I know if my patients called Health Link and were referred to the on-call physician?***

We suggest your call group develops a process for ensuring continuity of care for patients referred by Health Link to the on-call physician or after hours clinic. This could include the on-call physician communicating to the patient's primary physician.

12. ***Does my group have to collect data on after-hours calls from Health Link?***

For quality and resource utilization purposes, we would ask you to track referrals from Health Link and, if possible, the disposition of the caller by the physician. This will facilitate ongoing evaluation of the collaboration between Health Link and your group to ensure we are meeting patients' needs most effectively.

13. ***How will my patients know to call Health Link for after-hours concerns?***

Albertans already know to call 811 for any health concern 24/7. By educating your patients about the availability of an on-call physician, and that calling Health Link will help them determine whether they should speak to a physician, we can support continuity of care after hours.