

## **ACTION ON EMERGENCY SERVICE ACCESS**

There are 3.7 million people living in Alberta and they're visiting emergency departments 1.9 million times a year. Alberta Health Services has set achievable targets to improve access to emergency services for all Albertans, so they can receive the care they need and get back home sooner.

- For emergency department visits requiring hospital admission, the percentage of people whose length of stay is eight hours or less will increase from 48 per cent today to 90 per cent by 2015.
- For emergency department visits not requiring hospital admission, the percentage of people whose length of stay is four hours or less will increase from 80 per cent today to 90 per cent in 2015.

These targets mean Albertans will have some of the shortest emergency department lengths of stay in Canada. Alberta Health Services is trying to improve access to emergency for all Alberta by:

- Providing more timely treatment
- Improving patient flow
- Upgrading facilities
- Keeping seniors healthy and independent
- Streamlining ambulance transfers
- Improving access

### **Medical assessment units free beds, provide quicker access, providing more timely treatment**

Wait time doesn't need to be wasted time. Patients awaiting admission to an inpatient ward at Calgary's Rockyview General Hospital are being transferred out of the emergency department and into a medical assessment unit, where physicians and nurses initiate consultations, treatment and diagnostics. The 12-bed medical assessment unit was launched in February 2010; a second, 15-bed unit is expected to open in Fall 2010 at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton. Both are demonstration projects. Patients typically stay in a medical assessment unit between 24 and 48 hours. Patients can then be moved to the most appropriate inpatient unit or discharge home with appropriate community supports. These units free up treatment space in crowded emergency departments and reduce the amount of time our patients wait to begin treatment. Experiences at the Rockyview General Hospital and the Royal Alexandra Hospital will be shared as medical assessment units are considered in more hospitals across the province.

### **Prompt attention for Alberta's children, improving patient flow**

Medical attention cannot come fast enough when a sick or injured child visits the emergency department. At Alberta Children's Hospital in Calgary, many young patients waiting in the emergency department are seeing doctors sooner at a new 'flow bed' assessment area. Implemented in September 2009, these beds have helped the hospital reduce the time for most patients to see a physician by 15 minutes — a 15 per cent improvement. Around 60 per cent of patients coming to the hospital's emergency department are not seriously ill but do have ailments or injuries that require consultation with a physician. Without flow beds, these children and their families would have experienced longer waits. Instead of spending time in emergency waiting rooms, they're now being transferred to the flow bed area, located just inside the emergency department, and receiving prompt consultation with a physician. Then they can be admitted to hospital or be discharged with advice and/or instructions to follow up with a family doctor. So now when sick children come to the department, there is a bed available for them. The flow bed area may have as many as 10 beds during busy periods in the emergency department. More than 60,000 patients visit the Alberta Children's Hospital emergency department every year.

### **Four busy emergency departments expanding, upgrading facilities**

Construction projects at four Alberta hospitals are underway to improve access to emergency departments. Calgary's Rockyview General Hospital, Edmonton's University of Alberta Hospital and Stollery Children's Hospital, and Grande Prairie's QEII Hospital emergency department.

### **Programs reduce avoidable emergency visits, keeping seniors healthy and independent**

For some Alberta seniors, a visit to emergency can be the first step in making changes that prevent avoidable return emergency visits and help them stay safe, healthy and independent for as long as possible. Seniors represent about 10 per cent of Alberta’s population, yet account for up to 20 per cent of all emergency department visits. Alberta Health Services is reducing avoidable emergency visits by seniors and, in the process, improving access to emergency for everyone. The organization’s integrated seniors strategy makes this possible. Emergency departments in Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, Lethbridge and St. Albert employ specially trained care co-ordinators who assess elderly patients to determine if they need community supports, including home care services. They provide the link between hospital and community care, and help seniors make necessary adjustments in their routines, medications and/or living environment to help prevent avoidable emergency visits.

Other community initiatives, like adult day programs, aim to catch problems early before seniors end up in hospital. Many adult day programs provide seniors an opportunity to be monitored by a team of health professionals. A recent study of emergency department visits by seniors after their enrolment in adult day programs showed a substantial drop in emergency visits: 30 per cent after six months (in Edmonton’s Choice program) and 65 per cent after two years (in Calgary’s C3 program).

### **Earlier treatment means earlier discharge, streamlining ambulance transfers**

Calgary emergency medical technicians (EMTs) are teaming up with registered nurses (RNs) in a pilot project designed to reduce emergency department length of stay and get emergency medical crews back on the road sooner. Having to remain with their patients until formally transferred into hospital care can keep emergency medical crews at the hospital, out of their ambulance and away from the communities they serve for hours every shift. However, a new project at Calgary’s Rockyview General Hospital allows crews to transfer their patients to beds overseen by a hospital based EMT/RN team. If urgent medical care is required, patients are taken directly into the emergency department. Otherwise, patients arriving by ambulance can be assessed and transferred to a five-bed area close to the emergency department and begin treatment, freeing up ambulance crews so they can return to the road. Diagnostics and treatment can begin because an RN is present to work with paramedical staff. Earlier diagnosis means treatment can begin sooner resulting in an earlier discharge. This ultimately improves patient flow through the entire system. Sometimes patients discharged from (these) beds without needing to be seen in the mainstream emergency system.

### **Right care in right place eases emergency pressures, improving access**

Across the province, Urgent Care Centres and community clinics are keeping Albertans healthy and out of emergency departments. Urgent Care Centres help people who don’t need emergency care but require more than a visit to their doctor’s office or a walk-in clinic. More than 160,000 people are expected to visit the province’s five Urgent Care Centres this year – that means 160,000 fewer people in emergency and better access to emergency services for all. “At one site, we found a 22 to 25 per cent decrease in emergency utilization between the hours of operation of an Urgent Care Centre,” Dan Marchand, Provincial Director, Urgent Care, Community and Rural, Alberta Health Services.

#### **Alberta has five Urgent Care Centres:**

- South Calgary Health Centre
- Sheldon M. Chumir Health Centre in Calgary
- Okotoks Health and Wellness Centre
- Airdrie Regional Health Centre
- Health First Strathcona in Sherwood Park

Specialty clinics also ease emergency pressures by helping patients better manage their conditions to prevent complications that might land them in emergency.

#### **For more information:**

To find out more about how Alberta Health Services is trying to improve access to Emergency Department Services in Alberta, please visit <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/2031.asp>



**“Road to Healthy Living”**

Title of published newspaper articles and radio series from Alberta Health Services in various ethno-cultural publications to increase and promote health awareness among ethno-cultural communities.

Or speak to a nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling: Alberta Health Link toll free at 1-866-408-LINK (5465). Mandarin Health Link Calgary at 403-943-1554, Cantonese Health Link Calgary at 403-943-1556.

Source: Alberta Health Services website, [www.albertahealthservices.ca](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca)

If you want to read any of the previous ‘Road To Healthy Living’ series articles, please go to [http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/diversity/multilingual\\_health\\_services.htm](http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/programs/diversity/multilingual_health_services.htm) and get health information in your own language