

Alberta FAST Program

Frequently Asked Questions

Contents

| | |
|---|---|
| What is Alberta FAST?..... | 2 |
| Why FAST and why is it being implemented now? | 2 |
| Doesn't FAST already exist? | 2 |
| What specialties are included in FAST?..... | 2 |
| Referral-Related Questions | 3 |
| Now that FAST has launched, what do I need to do to make a referral?..... | 3 |
| Fax? Really? Can we do better?..... | 3 |
| Who chooses which provider my patient will see, or is it assigned?..... | 3 |
| Can I still use Alberta Netcare eReferral and/or Connect Care to make referrals? | 3 |
| Can I refer outside of my zone? | 3 |
| What happens to existing referrals that have already been submitted?..... | 4 |
| My patient has seen a surgeon in the past, should I send them back to the same surgeon?..... | 4 |
| Can I submit Worker's Compensation Board (WCB) referrals to FAST? | 4 |
| What if I have a question about a referral?..... | 4 |
| When will zonal specialty wait times become available so I know how long my patient will have to wait to see a surgeon?..... | 4 |
| How will I know my patient's status on a waitlist? | 4 |
| FAST Team Questions..... | 4 |
| Who is receiving my referrals? | 4 |
| How will I know my referral has been received?..... | 5 |
| What communications does the FAST program send to referring providers? | 5 |
| In the past, I have had notices back stating my referral is incomplete, but no guidance was provided on what was missing. Will this still be the case?..... | 5 |
| I have had referrals declined, without options on what to do next. How will FAST deal with this?..... | 5 |
| I have feedback on the FAST process I'd like to share. Can I do that? | 5 |
| Surgeon-Related Questions..... | 5 |
| Who is completing the triage?..... | 5 |
| Other Specialty Access Work..... | 6 |
| What other improvements to the referral and consultation process can I expect? | 6 |
| Where can I go for more information? | 6 |

Overview

What is Alberta FAST?

Alberta Facilitated Access to Specialized Treatment (FAST) is a central intake and distribution program for referrals to surgeons.

Referring providers fax referrals to the FAST team and indicate the preference of the next available surgeon with the shortest waitlist, a named surgeon, or an out-of-zone surgeon. A key benefit of FAST is that it helps providers refer their patient to a surgeon with the shortest wait list, or to a specified named surgeon if that is the referring provider's or patient's preference.

Why FAST and why is it being implemented now?

FAST is part of the Alberta Surgical Initiative (ASI), which focuses on improving the patient's surgical journey, from the time they seek advice from their family doctor, to when they are referred to a specialist, to their surgery and rehabilitation. There are many projects under ASI which, integrated together, will help improve the referral experience for both patients and providers.

Central access and intake programs, like FAST, are an evidence-informed component of achieving improved access in the healthcare system. Key benefits of FAST include:

- A simplified referral experience for providers, who can now fax one central FAST team in their zone to find the shortest wait list for their patient.
- Consistent referral processes, outlined in new pathways and standardized provincial referral forms, which will lead to less confusion and declined referrals for providers.
- As the FAST program is established, access to accurate wait time data will become available for providers and patients.

Doesn't FAST already exist?

A program in Edmonton called FAST has existed for many years. Many of the provincial program elements come from this model. The Edmonton FAST program remains operational and is now part of the provincial FAST program.

What specialties are included in FAST?

FAST is currently accepting orthopedics and urology referrals in most zones. The only exception is in Edmonton zone, where urology referrals are to be submitted through Alberta Netcare [eReferral](#). In addition, Edmonton zone FAST continues to accept referrals for general surgery, plastics, ENT/otolaryngology, colposcopy, and orthopedics.

The FAST program will expand to all surgical specialties in the coming months and is just one of several referral and consultation improvements being rolled out.

Referral-Related Questions

Now that FAST has launched, what do I need to do to make a referral?

1. Update your fax number to FAST for orthopedic and urology referrals. Find the fax number and referral instructions for your zone here:
 - [North zone](#)
 - [Central zone](#)
 - [South zone](#)
 - [Calgary zone](#)
 - [Edmonton zone](#)
2. Use new [Referral Pathways](#) to understand what is required for your referral to be clinically triaged. The pathways include standard reasons for referral and mandatory investigations.
3. Draft standardized provincial referral forms for urology and orthopedics have been added to most community EMRs including Ava, Juno, Healthquest, Telus – Med Access, Telus – PS Suite, Telus – CHR and QHR – Accuro. Referral forms will also be added to the [Alberta Referral Directory](#) (ARD) and to Telus – Wolf EMR in May. Please provide any feedback on these draft forms to ABFAST@ahs.ca.

As of March 3, 2023: Referrals submitted through FAST are visible in the Clinical Document Viewer (CDV) Tree in Alberta Netcare.

Fax? Really? Can we do better?

Yes fax, for now. A closed-loop referral solution is planned within the next couple of years. For primary care providers, participation in [CII/CPAR](#) is going to be a necessary component of the solution; if you are not live, please consider starting the process soon!

Referring providers who use eReferral can submit referrals for FAST as of Feb. 24. While using eReferral remains optional (except for Edmonton zone urology) it is another submission method to consider.

Who chooses which provider my patient will see, or is it assigned?

You and your patient choose together. When referring, you can choose:

- Next available surgeon with the shortest waitlist,
- A named surgeon you or the patient chooses, or
- An out-of-zone referral to a surgeon in a different part of the province.

Can I still use Alberta Netcare eReferral and/or Connect Care to make referrals?

Yes, referrals to FAST for orthopedics and urology will continue to be accepted through Alberta Netcare eReferral and are available via RightFax from Connect Care.

Can I refer outside of my zone?

Yes, you can refer outside your zone based on patient preference. Referring providers should alert the patient that they are responsible for all travel costs associated with their treatment. Patients will be expected to complete all follow up appointments with the same provider.

What happens to existing referrals that have already been submitted?

Existing referrals will hold their current place in the waitlist and will not be adversely affected when FAST adds new specialties.

My patient has seen a surgeon in the past, should I send them back to the same surgeon?

Please indicate on the referral who the patient has seen in the past and when. This information will help the FAST team to distribute the referral to the right surgeon.

Can I submit Worker's Compensation Board (WCB) referrals to FAST?

WCB referrals submitted to FAST will be declined as patients may be entitled to access an expedited surgery through WCB Alberta. Please contact the claim owner or call the WCB contact centre at 1-866-922-9221 for more information.

If expedited surgery is not an option, please return the referral to the FAST team along with confirmation that the patient does not qualify for expedited surgery through WCB.

What if I have a question about a referral?

Communication between providers is vital during the referral process. For questions, including if you have not received a receipt letter from the FAST team, call them at 1-833-553-3278 (833-553-FAST). If you know the assigned surgeon, reach out to their office with any patient updates or questions.

When will zonal specialty wait times become available so I know how long my patient will have to wait to see a surgeon?

As referrals are being submitted through FAST, data is being collected. This data helps the FAST teams send referrals to the next available surgeons, but it is also being used to build a wait times tool. Once the FAST program has received a significant amount of data about how long patients are waiting, it will be made accessible to primary care providers and patients. Having access to wait times supports the referring provider so they know how long their patient might have to wait and can trigger some care suggestions, like physiotherapy, they can try while they wait. It also helps the patient plan their life around their surgery.

How will I know my patient's status on a waitlist?

As per CPSA standards of Referral Consultation, if the patient has been waitlisted, the primary care provider and the patient should receive a letter every three months from the surgeon's office with the most recent status.

FAST Team Questions

Who is receiving my referrals?

The referrals are received by the zone FAST program which is staffed by nurses and clerks. The FAST team ensures the referral is complete, records the referral into a provincial tracking database and will forward it to the next available surgeon or specific surgeon as indicated on the referral form.

How will I know my referral has been received?

You will receive a letter from the FAST team confirming receipt of the referral including the name and contact information of the surgeon your referral has been assigned to. Although the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA) standards suggest up to seven days for this step, FAST standards are for this step to occur within two business days.

What communications does the FAST program send to referring providers?

The FAST program supports implementation of CPSA standards of communication. FAST teams will send you the following referral letters as appropriate:

- Receipt: The referral has been received by the FAST program. It will be forwarded to the appropriate surgeon for review and approval.
- Accepted: The referral has been accepted by the FAST program and forwarded to the appropriate surgeon.
- Re-assigned: The accepted referral has been reassigned to a new surgeon.
- Incomplete: The referral is missing information required before it can be accepted by the FAST program.
- Declined: The referral has been declined as the patient has been previously treated by another provider for the condition or the specialty/surgeon is not currently part of the FAST program.
- Cancellation: The referral has been cancelled because the patient no longer requires the appointment.
- Pending: The referral requires a review by the specialist before being accepted by the FAST program.

In the past, I have had notices back stating my referral is incomplete, but no guidance was provided on what was missing. Will this still be the case?

You may receive a letter from the FAST team that the referral is incomplete; however, this letter will specify what information is required to complete the referral for resubmission.

I have had referrals declined, without options on what to do next. How will FAST deal with this?

If you receive a notice from the FAST team that the referral has been declined, you will also receive rationale and further instructions, including a number to call to discuss the case as needed.

I have feedback on the FAST process I'd like to share. Can I do that?

Please email any feedback or suggestions for improvement to ABFAST@ahs.ca.

Surgeon-Related Questions

Who is completing the triage?

The assigned surgeon will complete the clinical triage. You will receive a letter from the surgeon confirming that the patient has either been assigned an appointment or waitlisted. If the

appointment is made, this date will be included in the letter back to you. Patients will also receive this communication from the surgeon. As per CPSA standards, this communication will happen within 14 days.

Other Specialty Access Work

What other improvements to the referral and consultation process can I expect?

FAST is just one of several initiatives being rolled out to improve the referral and consultation process for both providers and patients. These initiatives will work in concert to make the biggest impact. Other improvements include:

- A closed-loop electronic referral solution in Alberta.
- Consistent provincial pathways for providers and patients.
- Specialty advice that connects primary care providers with surgeons.
- Pre- and post-surgical community supports.

Where can I go for more information?

Go online to ahs.ca/specialtyaccess or email ABFAST@ahs.ca.