

Alberta FAST (Facilitated Access to Specialized Treatment) Program

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated June 28, 2022

General Questions:

What is Alberta FAST?

Alberta FAST is a central access and intake program for referrals to specialists. Central access and intake programs are an evidence-informed component of achieving improved access in the healthcare system.

Why FAST and why now?

FAST is one of several projects identified as a part of the Alberta Surgical Initiative (ASI), a plan to improve Albertan's access to surgery. The ASI is looking at the whole patient journey of *referral* to *surgery* through to the recovery phase. FAST is an important component of the overall ASI project.

What specialties are in queue to join FAST?

Orthopedics and Urology will begin going live in some parts of the province starting in summer 2022.

Other specialties in queue include: Ophthalmology, Gynecology, Vascular Surgery, General Surgery, Thoracic Surgery, Neurosurgery, Pediatric Surgery, Otolaryngology, Plastics & Reconstructive Surgery, Cardiac Surgery, and Oral Maxillofacial Surgery.

Doesn't FAST already exist?

A program in Edmonton called Facilitated Access to Surgical Treatment has existed for many years. Some of the provincial program elements come from this model. The Edmonton FAST program will remain operational and will align to the provincial standards for each of the zone FAST programs and will be re-branded from surgical to specialized.

How can I get involved?

Please reach out to the AMA-ACTT program via actt@albertadoctors.org to express interest and someone will get back to you within a few days.

Primary Care Provider Questions:

How will I know where to send referrals?

As each zone FAST program goes live for each specialty, updates will be sent out via the Primary Care Networks, Alberta Medical Association, Alberta Health Services and other partner organizations to make

primary care providers aware of the changes. If referring providers send their referrals through their existing routes, the specialty offices will re-route the referral and notify the referring provider that the referral has been forwarded to FAST.

What will change as part of my practice?

As each FAST program goes live, the major change will be a change in fax number. Each clinic will need to update their fax numbers as per their own process. The good news is that as each specialty goes live, it will be the same fax number.

What referral forms do I use?

New referral forms for each specialty are being co-designed by primary care and the relevant specialty care providers. They will eventually be incorporated into the major EMR systems used in Alberta. In the interim, existing referral forms will be accepted.

I struggle with my EMR, will there be help available with the new referral forms?

Yes! Advice for how to tidy up old forms and incorporate the new forms will be available for each of the major EMR vendors. Advice to optimize referral tracking from within your EMR will also be made available.

Can I choose a provider or is it assigned?

You and your patient can choose to see either a particular surgeon, or the one that's next available.

Can I refer outside of my zone?

Yes, you can refer to the zone based on patient preference. Referring providers should alert the patient that they are responsible for travel costs associated with their appointment. They are also expected to complete follow up appointments with the same provider.

Who is receiving my referrals?

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

How will I know my referral has been received?

You will receive a letter from the FAST office confirming receipt of the referral including the name and contact information of the consulting provider. Although 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.

Who is completing the triage?

The assigned consulting provider will complete the triage. You will receive a letter from the consulting provider 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. As per CPSA standards, this communication will happen within 14 days.

What if I have a question for the FAST program or consulting provider?

Communication between providers is vital during the referral process. You will have the contact information for the consulting provider's office. And there will be one provincial toll-free number for the FAST Offices should you have questions about the referral status.

In the past I have had notices come back to me that my referral is incomplete, but no guidance has been provided. Will this still be the case?

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

I have also had referrals declined, then patients come back to me in primary care and I don't have any options on what to do next. How will FAST deal with this?

If you receive a notice 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.

How will you ensure that patients don't get lost on a waitlist?

If the patient has been waitlisted, you will receive a letter every 90 days from the consulting provider's office with the most recent status. Patients will also receive this communication.

When will data on this program become available?

As the FAST programs become operational and data is inputted and felt to be reliable, it will be shared with providers. Processes for how this will be done have not yet been decided.

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!

Specialty Physician Questions:

Coming soon!