

Family Caregiver Wellness Initiative



NorQuest College

Navigating the Health Care System

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Learning Objectives

By the end of this workshop, you will be able to:

1. Examine Alberta Health Services' care system
2. Explore differences between care facilities within the healthcare system
3. Examine the different caregiver roles and determine their functions within the healthcare system including the role of family caregiver
4. Summarize steps to take to plan for care needs and preparing for healthcare appointments
5. Learn about ways to increase competency in supporting the Family Caregiver
6. Outline resources available to support caregivers and how to access them

Care Services in Alberta

Alberta is currently restructuring the healthcare system to address difficulties and inefficiencies within the existing system. Care in Alberta is essentially divided into four main types with each coordinated by a health agency.

Primary Care provincial health agency

Primary Care includes any services in your community that you need to manage your health day-to-day, such as access to a family physician, pharmacy services, access to a dietician etc. These services can be accessed at any time according to the provider's appointment availability or regular business hours.

Acute Care provincial health agency

Acute health care services are those accessed in an emergency or due to serious illness or injury. This includes hospitals, emergency medical services (EMS), emergency rooms, surgeries, cancer care, urgent care centres (for emergency but non-life-threatening health concerns) and laboratory services. These services are accessed through appointments, referrals and as needed for emergency care like EMS and emergency rooms.

Mental Health and Addiction provincial health agency

Mental health and addictions care services are focused on recovery and include prevention, intervention, treatment and recovery supports for adults and children struggling with mental health and addiction.

The health agency responsible for providing these services is called Recovery Alberta. Access more information here: <https://recoveryalberta.ca/>

Continuing Care provincial health agency

Continuing Care in Alberta includes services that support your health, personal care and accommodation needs to maintain your independence and quality of life and includes a variety of settings:

- Home and Community Care
- Supportive Living
- Continuing Care Homes

Examples of services include dressing, eating and bathing assistance, wound care, medication administration and many other healthcare supports and services.

Continuing Care Services in Alberta

Accessing Continuing Care

Any Albertan is eligible to receive continuing care services through an assessment of the person's unmet care needs. A case manager will be assigned to you, and they will contact you to schedule an assessment. To start this process, call Health Link at 811.

The Alberta Government website provides information on continuing care. It is a good site to check for information about accommodations. [Found here](#)

Depending on the identified needs, you'll be directed to one of three possible streams of service: home and community care, supportive living or continuing care homes.

Home and Community Care

Home and community care includes health and personal care services and supports clients of all ages to live independently for as long as possible in their own home.

Home and community care services:

- include supports for caregivers, such as respite care, to ensure their needs are also met
- can be received on a short-term basis to help recover from an accident, injury or illness or on a long-term basis due to disease, disability or aging

There are now three types of home and community service providers and all three are, for the most part, publicly funded (at no cost to you). Services are scheduled and pre-set, and additional services would have to be discussed with your case manager. You can receive a mix of Type 1, 2 or 3 care at the same time.

Type 1: care will be provided directly by the health authority. This is usually for people who require case management, for example an assessment of needs or health system navigation, or professional health services, such as needing care from a registered nurse, a physiotherapist or a social worker.

Type 2: care will be provided by a provider who has an agreement with the health authority and is usually for people who require personal care (bathing, dressing etc.), home support services (homemaking services, heavy housework etc.) and caregiver support services such as respite care. The care would usually be provided by health care aides and licensed practical nurses.

Type 3: care will be provided by a provider of your choosing after your assessment by a case manager and is typically for clients with stable, ongoing needs for personal care, respite care and home support services. If the cost of the services offered by the provider you choose is higher than the cost of publicly-funding care, you will have to pay the difference.

Type 3 also includes different existing programs such as the [Self-Managed Care](#) and [Client Directed Home Care Invoicing](#), each with their own requirements. You can read more about each program by clicking on the blue links above.

Type 1 and 2 providers are required to follow specific requirements, including meeting the Continuing Care Health Services Standards and are monitored and inspected by the health authority. Type 3 providers are not required to follow these standards since they are run independently of the health authority.

There are private home care providers that family caregivers can hire to provide in home services and respite care. For example (note that NorQuest College does not endorse any of the providers listed)

- Home Instead Senior Care

- Nurse Next Door
- Home Care Assistance of Edmonton
- Senior Homecare By Angels
- Harmony Caregiving
- Compassion network

Other resources such as Telus Health Living Well Companion (note that NorQuest College does not endorse this product but rather showing options available) offer personal medical alert service (automatic fall detection, 24/7 emergency support) at a push of the button.

Escalation of care may be required if you find that your loved one is not able to stay in their home with the supports you have in place. Your loved one may need to be reassessed by your case manager and together with you, determine the best living arrangements for your loved one to be safe, healthy, and happy.

Some options that are available through Alberta Health Services are listed below.

Supportive Living Accommodations

These types of care settings offer as much independence as possible while still providing a group setting in a licensed environment. Supportive living accommodations are home to 4 or more adults, include 24-hour security services, and must provide some accommodation services such as meals, housekeeping and social or leisure activities. If an operator meets these criteria, they must receive a license, which allows for oversight to ensure they follow the Accommodation Standards and regulatory requirements set by the Government of Alberta.

Sites may be referred to in many ways, such as:

- Lodges
- Group homes
- Retirement residences
- Senior's residences
- Independent seniors living
- Assisted living
- Private assisted living

Adults who choose to live in supportive living accommodations need or want more help with various daily living tasks such as meals and laundry services, but personal care is not provided directly from the supportive living accommodation. Adults residing in the accommodations can still qualify to receive home and community care as outlined in the section "Home and Community Care".

Most supportive living accommodations are privately funded which means you will pay for the accommodation and services they provide yourself. The supportive living operators set their own criteria for eligibility to access their site and decide how much they charge for rent and which services they will offer. To determine if a supportive living accommodation meets your needs, you should meet with the operator, tour the accommodation, and talk to some of the residents.

A few supportive living accommodations are publicly funded for low-income seniors or adults with special needs as outlined in the image below:



Group homes

- Typically small, residential settings that accommodate 4-8 residents
- Residential support services are provided to adults with physical or mental disabilities or illnesses
- Services are provided based on an agreement between the group home and the Government of Alberta



Lodges

- Operated under the *Alberta Housing Act*
- Designed to provide accommodations and meals for seniors who are independent (though may require community-based services)
- Intended to provide seniors with affordable accommodations
- Accommodation charges for residents over the age of 65 must be low enough to leave residents with a minimum disposable income set by the Government of Alberta

Continuing Care Homes

Continuing Care homes are licensed settings where personal care, nursing and other support services are publicly funded (at no cost to you) and offered on an ongoing basis. While health and personal care are managed through funding by the government, residents of continuing care homes are responsible for paying an accommodation charge that pays for rent, meals, housekeeping and building maintenance. The costs vary but there is a maximum daily rate set by the government of Alberta. Find that information here: [Accommodation charge](#)

There are three types of continuing care homes:

Type A (formerly known as long-term care, nursing homes or auxiliary hospitals): for people with complex health needs who are unable to remain safely in other accommodations. People living in Type A accommodations receive 24/7 care by professional nursing (RN, PRN or NP) as well as personal care and other services like rehabilitation therapy and recreation therapy).

Type B (formerly known as Designated Supportive Living [DSL] 3, 4 or 4D): for people with varying health needs that cannot stay in other accommodations but don't require the same level of support as Type A accommodation. Services include meals and 24/7 on-site personal care, recreation and support services as well as other services like rehabilitation therapy and recreation therapy. Nursing care is provided by regulated nurses including licensed practical nurses (LPNs).

Type C (formerly known as Residential Hospice Care): for people approaching end-of-life who require palliative care. Admission typically occurs in the last three months of life. Services include accommodation, meals and 24/7 on-site personal care, nursing care and other support services as needed. Residents of Type C accommodations do not pay a fee for accommodation or care.

Type A and Type B continuing care homes must follow standards outlined in the Continuing Care Health Services Standards as well as the Accommodations Standards set by the government of Alberta. Type C homes are settings managed by operators contracted through Alberta Health and do not have to follow the same standards listed above though they may have standards listed in their

operational contract.

Medication Assistance Program

- A program that helps a person manage their daily medication needs
- Provided by HCA

Rehabilitative or Restorative Care

- Specialized care provided in a variety of settings (home, supportive living, long-term care, acute care facilities)
- Doctor's referral needed
- Focus is on maximizing an optimal level of functioning
- Rehabilitative/Restorative care is for
 - People who no longer need acute level of care but require more care prior going home
 - Those who require nursing care on a 24-hour basis
 - Those willing and able to participate in the program
 - Those who have potential for improvement in functional status
- Service providers include dietitians, doctors, occupational therapist, pharmacist, physical therapist, recreational therapist, RN, social worker, speech-language pathologist
- Locations are in a variety of setting, but all clients will have access to acute care assessment and diagnostic services

Respite Care

Respite care means temporary care of a sick, elderly, or disabled person, which provides relief for their usual caregiver. It is important for all caregivers to take time off and have a break from caring for a loved one. Respite care can be done in or outside of the home; for brief periods; by informal and professional caregivers.

There are several ways to find respite opportunities but the easiest place to start is by calling Health Link at 811.

- Alberta Health Services has respite care that provides short-term relief from responsibilities as a caregiver.
 - Need to contact sites directly for admission processes
 - There may be a fee which is site specific, seniors may submit receipts to Alberta Seniors Benefits
 - If your loved one is already accessing home and community care, you can contact your case manager and they will help you to arrange respite care.
 - Service Locations in Alberta (check out the website: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/findhealth/service.a.spx?id=5436>)
- Harmony Caregiving provides in-home respite care. You may be eligible for funding for respite care services through Alberta Health Services.
 - Care available 24 hours/7 days a week
 - Call 780-328-3917 to discuss needs, arrange care, and associated fees
- Home Instead provides in-home respite care that gives you a break from caregiving
 - Receive respite care on 24 hour/7 days a week basis. It can be regularly scheduled or when you need it

- Serves West Edmonton, St. Albert, Sturgeon County, Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, Parkland County, Morinville, Devon, Leduc, Wetaskiwin, and Calmar
- Call 587-686-0143 to discuss your needs, arrange care, and associated fees
- Comfort Keepers of Edmonton Alberta provide in-home care for seniors and other adults who require help to relieve caregivers so they can have a break.
 - Call 780-465-4665 to discuss needs, arrange care, and associated fees
 - You can also explore their website: <https://www.comfortkeepers.ca/edmonton/>
- Bayshore Health Care provides respite care at home, in a seniors' retirement community, or a long-term care facility.
 - Customized to meet your needs
 - Gives you a break from the caregiving role
 - Contact 780-801-3880 or 1-855-326-9604 to discuss needs, arrange care, and associated fees

Adult Day Programs

Day programs are available throughout Alberta and provide respite and education for caregivers. Your loved one would attend the day program for a daily fee where the focus will be on meeting your loved one's socialization needs and provide them with access to professional services such as rehabilitation, social, nursing etc...

To be eligible to access a day program, your loved one must be living at home and not be in a supportive living environment or in a continuing care home. Adult day programs are appropriate for adults who:

- Are able to regularly attend and participate in the program
- Are able to function appropriately in a group setting
- Are at risk of losing their ability to manage independently in the community, but wish to continue living at home (and can do so safely)
- With a history of increased healthcare usage
- With chronic or complex medical conditions
- With signs and symptoms of cognitive impairment
- Whose caregiver is in need of respite

To access day program services, speak to your home and community care case manager if your loved one is already receiving services, otherwise please contact Health Link at 811 to start the process.

Alberta's Health Care System: Health Professionals

The health care that you receive is provided by a variety of health care professionals. Always included in this team are physicians and/or nurse practitioners, and the family/informal caregiver. We will briefly review these and other members of the care team that you may encounter during your caregiving journey

Client (care recipient)

- The person receiving care must always be at the centre of the team and be included in decision making (when possible) about their care.

Family Caregiver or Informal Caregiver

- The World Health Organization identifies family caregivers as those who provide informal unpaid care.
- Family caregivers are at the heart and a necessity for our health care system. They are often stretched beyond capacity and experience high levels of stress.
- A way to alleviate this is to recognize that they are a part of the team and ensure they have the knowledge, skills, and support needed to continue in the caregiver role as long as they are able.
- It is important to know what information to provide and what questions to ask to be a valued member of the team along with your loved one.

Registered Nurses (RN)

- Professional nurses that assess, plan, implement, and evaluate patient care within Alberta's Health Care system. They coordinate patient care as part of a team with physicians and other health providers.
- They care for individuals, families, groups, and communities to be healthy, and they assess clients for physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health needs.
- RN's work in a variety of settings such as: health clinics, hospitals or health care centres, doctor's offices, home and community care, continuing care homes, schools etc.

Licensed practical nurses (LPN)

- Professional nurses that assess, plan, implement, and evaluate patient care within Alberta's Health Care system. They collaborate with other healthcare team members and directly provide care to patients and their families.
- They have the knowledge, skill, judgement and ability to contribute to many types of patient care in a variety of settings such as: acute care (hospitals), community health centres, continuing care facilities, clinics, urgent care centres, client homes, palliative care etc.

Health Care Aides (HCA)

- Provide direct care, personal assistance and support to patients who are ill, elderly or disabled. They assist patients with activities such as bathing, grooming, dressing, and toileting. They may help with feeding or exercise and in some settings help patients take their medications.
- They work in a variety of settings such as continuing care facilities, hospitals or health care centres, home and community care etc.

Pharmacist

- They ensure drug treatment plans are safe and effective. They oversee preparation and distribution of prescription medications, patient prescriptions and drug information to look for warnings and potential interactions with other medications or treatments. They also provide medication information and counselling.
- They work in a variety of settings such as hospitals, community health offices,

cancer care centres, ambulatory clinics, home care etc.

Social Worker

- Provide a broad range of services related to social and family support services to solve issues with relationships and enhance social well-being. They provide emotional support, advocacy, referrals, counseling and discharge care plans. They also assist those who need support in finding food, housing, and transportation to appointments.
- They work in a variety of settings such as hospitals, home care centers, client homes etc.

Physical therapists (PT)

- Help patients prevent or manage a condition to achieve long term health benefits through movement, reducing pain, restoring function, and preventing disability.
- They assess, diagnose and treat difficulties with movement, help people prevent and manage pain, create customized plans to improve mobility for daily life, prescribe therapeutic exercise and use education and a variety of techniques and equipment to help people stay well or improve their physical health.

Occupational therapists (OT)

- Occupational therapists (OT) help people get back to everyday activities — the “jobs of living” (occupations). They help the patient change some part of their life — by developing skills, improving physical and emotional abilities, adapting the environment or changing the way they do activities — so the patient can better cope with aging, disease, injury or illness.

Speech Language Pathologists (SLP)

- Speech Language Pathologists (SLP) assess and treat infants, children and adults who have problems with communication or feeding and swallowing. This includes problems with speaking, understanding and using language, voice, and fluency. These problems may be present from birth, have developed over time or result from an illness or trauma.

Recreation Therapists (RecT)

- Recreation therapists work with clients and families help them return to and/or participate in leisure, social, physical and community roles. They help a client address barriers to leisure due to illness, disability, chronic condition or aging. Recreation therapists promote health and wellness.

Therapy Assistants (TA)

- Carry out treatment plans designed by physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech-language pathologists. They work directly with clients to assist them in developing, supporting or improving psychosocial, physical, cognitive, and communication skills. Additionally, they help clients learn the skills needed for daily living including exercises, how to use equipment (e.g., wheelchairs, walkers), and language therapy.

Preparation for Medical Appointments

As a caregiver, you may be involved with the healthcare professionals looking after your loved one. Regardless of the type of appointment your loved one needs to attend, it is important to prepare for the visit. Often during healthcare appointments, people feel stressed, pressured, and intimidated which can result in forgetting important information to share and/or questions to ask. Here are some helpful things to consider prior to your next healthcare appointment:

Before an appointment:

- Think about the visit and what your loved one would like to share
 - If pain, what type of pain, location of pain, on a scale of 0-10 what the pain level is, when pain started, what makes it better.
 - These same questions apply for other symptoms: when they started, what makes them worse, what makes it better, how often they are experienced.
 - Keeping a journal is often helpful.
- Every time you have an appointment with a new healthcare provider, you are often asked to share your loved one's health history.
 - It is helpful to keep track of diagnosed conditions, surgeries, x-rays, and any other tests that have been done. With this information it is also important to record dates.
- Keep a list of current medications (prescription, over the counter, vitamins, supplements, herbal/naturopathic treatments/substances)
- Keep a list of allergies
- Keep a list of equipment that is used by your loved one (eyeglasses, hearing aids, dentures, walker, cane, splints).
 - Make sure these are brought to appointments.
- Plan to arrive early to your appointment.
- Be aware that there is only so much time allocated for each appointment, and you may not be able to cover all your concerns.
 - Prioritize concerns and make additional appointments as needed
- You will also need to have government issued photo identification, Alberta personal health card, any health insurance information, any referrals or discharge summaries, tracking tools you have been asked to keep (e.g., blood glucose, food intake).
- Discuss completing personal directive and enduring power of attorney. Information can be found [here](#).
- It is important to speak with your loved one or care recipient about Goals of Care and facilitate this discussion with their family physician.
- [Alberta Health Services](#) has information and templates that can be used for recording information from healthcare appointments.

Information tracking

As mentioned, it is important to keep track of all this information. Some prefer to use paper and pens such as a journal or printable templates that are available online.

Electronic tracking is also available through medical apps. Alberta health has an online record through myhealth.alberta.ca.

There are also many different apps that have been created to help patients track their health in a variety of ways. A quick search online will provide you with lists of many apps

that may fit your needs. You can also search directly in the Apple Store or on the Google Play store for what you are looking for. For example, a search for “medication tracker” in the Google Play store brings up at least 10 available apps, some that are free and some that you need to pay for.

Communication

Communication is the number one breakdown in the health sector; therefore it is important to keep lines of communication open, be realistic about expectations, and clear about what you want from your healthcare provider. Time can also be a barrier to a good relationship with your physician as they often have limited time available for each appointment.

It's important for you and your loved one to develop a relationship with their doctor, so that you both feel comfortable sharing information and confident in the care they provide. If your loved one does not have a family doctor, this Alberta Health Services website offers 3 ways to search for a family doctor: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/page13253.aspx>

Factors that influence communication

Many factors can influence communication. It is important to respect each other and try to understand what each person is saying. If you feel that your care provider is hesitant or feel uncertain about their instructions, then it is important to express these feelings and share your concerns. Mood and emotions can influence communication. If you are angry or upset, then try to calm yourself first before responding to a healthcare provider.

Please try to:

- Choose your words carefully so that everyone understands e.g., avoid over-generalizations or exaggerations
- Speak clearly, slowly, and distinctly
- Use visual clues e.g., write message down, show a picture
- Be aware of your tone of voice e.g., avoid shouting
- Do not pretend to understand. If you do not understand something, ask questions
- Ask one question at a time

Tips to help you communicate with the care team

1. Write down your loved one's questions/concerns ahead of time
 - a. If there are a lot of topics to cover then make a longer appointment
2. Be brief when describing symptoms or concerns. It is important to be concise:
 - a. when did it start
 - b. how long has it lasted
 - c. where is it located
 - d. what makes it better or worse
 - e. have you had it before
 - f. any changes in diet, medications, activities
 - g. what worries you most about the symptom
 - h. Do not self-diagnose

3. When your care professional provides information or a diagnosis, it is important to get clear information. Ask questions such as: what caused it, is it contagious, what can be done (advantages/disadvantages of treatment options).
4. Confirm if follow up is needed and when as it is important to be an active participant in your health.
5. Repeat instructions so you are sure of what is required of you
 - a. If needed ask the healthcare team member to write down any information you need
6. Ask for additional reading material to help you understand (if you are still confused or unsure)
7. If you are not able to follow through with treatment, tell your care team member and explain why. For example, I didn't take that medication because it made me feel sick to my stomach or, I didn't go to physiotherapy because I didn't have the money to pay for it.
8. If a referral is made to a specialist, be sure to get the information of the doctor/agency, phone number and instructions for who is setting up the appointment.
 - a. If you are being sent to the emergency or urgent care, then ask your doctor to call ahead or write a note saying why they have referred you.

Unresolved concerns or complaints

If you have unresolved concerns, complaints, or want to provide feedback on your healthcare experience, go to this website for more information on how:

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/about/patientfeedback.aspx>

The two options are summarized below. All information can be found on the link above.

- Option 1: talk to your healthcare provider directly. This is encouraged and often the best way to proceed.
- Option 2: contact the patient relations department at 1-855-550- 2555 or fill out the [Patient feedback form](#)

If your complaint is related to a Physician, surgeon, physician assistant or osteopath, you may also contact the College of Physicians and Surgeons directly. Review the information on complaints here: <https://cpsa.ca/albertans/albertan-complaints/submitting-a-complaint/>

Resource Support

These days most resources are found online and therefore access to a computer is important to access resources that are available for seniors and their caregivers.

Three good websites to access information regarding supports that are available for seniors and their caregivers:

- [Government of Canada Programs and Services for Seniors](#)
 - Provides information on programs and services for seniors
 - Has a section on caregiving benefits and information
- [Alberta Government website](#)
 - Provides information on financial assistance for seniors and supports for seniors
 - Under the Supports for Caregivers and Organizations section, you will find information about resources to help seniors age in their community
- [Alberta Health Services \(AHS\) website](#)

- This link provides information on programs and services for Seniors Health such as the family caregiver centre
- [Covenant Health Seniors Network website](#)
 - Has information and resources for caregivers, healthcare professionals, and seniors
- [Caregivers Alberta](#)
 - Offers supports and resources for caregivers
- [MyHealth.Alberta.ca](#)
 - has a lot of information for the public and in general is a good site to check for information
 - Specific information such as [Caregiver Tips](#) can be found on the site

If you are not comfortable with finding information online, the best starting point is calling Health Link at 811 which provides a variety of clinical services that include Telehealth triage, Health advice and Navigation services.

As we've outlined in this handout, there are numerous resources to support people in the community. This support is often provided through Alberta Health Services but can also be obtained through private companies for a fee.

Examples of private companies would be personal patient navigation services like:

- [Advocann](#)
- [Navigate your health](#)

Canada Caregiver Credit

Family caregivers (persons supporting a spouse or common-law partner, or a dependent¹ with a physical or mental impairment) can claim the non-refundable Canada caregiver (tax) credit.

The amount of money you can claim is dependent on your relationship with the person you are providing care for.

You do not need to submit any documents when you file this claim. However, you should procure and keep, should the CRA request the same, a signed statement from a medical practitioner that states when the impairment began and how long the impairment is expected to last. For children under 18 years of age, the statement should be expanded to include whether or not the child will be likely to depend on others for a long or continuous period due to the impairment noted.

Go to the Government of Canada website to read more about the Canada Caregiver Credit here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/individuals/topics/about-your-tax-return/tax-return/completing-a-tax-return/deductions-credits-expenses/canada-caregiver-amount.html>

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