

Frequently Asked Questions



FAST:
FACILITATED
ACCESS TO
SPECIALIZED
TREATMENT

General Information

What is FAST?

Facilitated Access to Specialized Treatment (FAST) is a provincial central access and intake program that receives surgical referrals, checks them for completeness and sends them to surgeons for triage and booking.

What specialties are available through FAST?

The specialties below accept referrals through FAST. All specialties will join FAST by 2025 with some Zonal exceptions.

Specialty (alphabetical order)	North Zone	Edmonton Zone	Central Zone	Calgary Zone	South Zone
Cardiac Surgery					
General Surgery	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Gynecology					
Neurosurgery					
Oral Maxillofacial Surgery					
Orthopedics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Otolaryngology		✓			
Pediatric Surgery					
Plastic Surgery		✓			
Podiatry (Calgary)					
Thoracic Surgery					
Urology	✓		✓	✓	✓
Vascular Surgery	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Consult Zone Instructions on ahs.ca/FAST before submitting a referral for individual Zonal exceptions (linked here):

- [North Zone](#)
- [Edmonton Zone](#)
- [Central Zone](#)
- [Calgary Zone](#)
- [South Zone](#)

Learn more at ahs.ca/FAST

Updated April 2024

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What are the benefits of FAST for referring providers?

- One central access point per Zone for submitting referrals.
- Option to send referrals to next available provider with the shortest wait time, a named provider/clinic/site, or an out-of-zone provider.
- FAST reviews referrals for completeness and notifies providers when missing information is required. This allows providers to submit the missing information, rather than be declined and start the process over again.
- FAST team is available to answer questions Monday to Friday by email and phone.
- FAST complies with CPSA communication standards to inform providers where referrals have been sent.
- Referral status available on Alberta Netcare eReferral.

What are the benefits of FAST for surgeons and their teams?

FAST checks referrals for completeness and accuracy before being distributed to surgeons. This helps:

- Surgical teams focus on triage and service delivery, rather than collecting missing information.
- Standardized referral forms and referral pathways improve the quality of referrals submitted.

Joining FAST

Do referring providers need to sign up for FAST?

No, referring providers can submit referrals directly to FAST.

Do surgeons need to sign up for FAST?

Yes, surgeons need to join the FAST program before receiving referrals. This allows the FAST team to collect important information on their practice profile and conditions accepted for consultation.

Surgeons will be invited to join the program through their section lead or surgeon champion several months before launch. An onboarding package will be sent that includes information about FAST, a roles and responsibilities document to review, and a brief survey to capture their practice preferences.

Is joining FAST mandated for surgeons?

Participation in FAST is encouraged but not mandatory. Surgeon champions will share information about FAST at upcoming specialty meetings, webinars or townhalls for you to understand the process and to ask any questions.

As a surgeon, am I signing a formal contract to join FAST?

No, there is no legally binding agreement between you and FAST. As part of onboarding, you will only be asked to review documentation that explains the responsibilities of your team and of FAST's, and to confirm you agree with the principles of the FAST program.

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Benefits & Impacts

How has the patient voice been incorporated into FAST?

AHS patient and family advisors have been actively involved in the development of FAST by reviewing documents like referral pathways, offering feedback on Zone-based processes, and providing suggestions for surgical improvements.

How does FAST streamline current referral processes for surgery?

Centralizing the surgical referral process so referrals are sent to one location per Zone means referring providers will no longer have to remember multiple fax numbers for surgical specialties, reducing the risk of misplaced, or lost, referrals. Furthermore, with one phone number, referring providers can talk to someone in their Zone Monday – Friday about their surgical referral or with any questions they may have.

As a referring provider how will using FAST change my relationships with surgeons?

FAST is designed to improve access to surgical care. It is not expected to impact any of your current relationships. If you would like to use a specific surgeon, ensure you include their name on the referral form so the FAST team can assign the referral to them.

How will joining FAST impact me as a surgeon?

The impact of joining FAST will be minimal. One key change is that you will receive referrals from the FAST office, rather than from referring providers directly. This is helpful as all the referrals are reviewed for duplicates and completeness prior to being sent to you. The goal is to provide you with referrals that have the right information to triage the patient as quickly as possible and to avoid requesting and/or waiting for missing information.

Additionally, when joining FAST, you will share your practice profile that includes what reasons for referral you see and your desired referral capacity. This information is used by FAST to assign you referrals based on your individual preferences. You also can communicate with the FAST team to ensure that your referral volume is appropriate for your capacity.

What impact does FAST have on my office staff/Medical Office Assistants (MOAs)?

For referring providers, the goal is to reduce unnecessary back and forth communication currently required to submit a referral. With standardized referral forms and referral pathways, all information required can be submitted at once so the referral can be quickly accepted by the surgeon. Office staff can also go online through Alberta Netcare eReferral to check on their status of their referral when it's convenient for them rather than calling the surgeon's office directly.

For surgeon offices, FAST team members will connect with MOAs and office staff to explain the FAST process and provide them with tools to support uptake to the program. One key activity office staff/MOAs will be expected to share with the FAST team each month is dates when referrals are accepted, when appointments are booked and when appointments are attended. Collecting this information should take staff less than 15 minutes each month, and more information about how to submit this information will be shared before launching FAST.

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As a surgeon, how will FAST impact the types of referrals I see?

No matter where in the province the referral originates, there will be a standardized referral pathway outlining what to include in the referral. This will improve your user experience, ensuring referrals are received with the information needed to accurately triage and book a patient.

As a surgeon, how will this impact my clinic scheduling?

When joining FAST, you will be asked to share your specialty and practice preferences. FAST will only send you referrals based on this information. Additionally, if you will be away for an extended period of time, you can let FAST know to pause your referrals.

How are CPSA standards incorporated into FAST processes?

Communication between referring providers and surgeons is vital during the referral process. To align with the CPSA standard of practice of acknowledging the receipt of a referral within seven days the FAST team aims to process complete referrals and communicate with referring providers within two business days, including information about where the status of the referral and where it has been sent.

Once the referral is sent to the surgeon's office, the surgeon's office is responsible for meeting all further CPSA standards.

Referral Process

How do I submit a referral to FAST?

1. View the **referral form**:
 - [Orthopedics](#)
 - [Vascular](#)
 - [Urology](#) (excluding Edmonton Zone)
 - [General Surgery](#)
2. Visit [Alberta's Pathway Hub](#) to access the current pathway library and review the **Referral pathway** reasons for referral and include any mandatory required information with your referral.
3. Submit your referral by fax.
Visit ahs.ca/FAST, Zone Instructions for specific submission information.

Will my patient have options on who to see?

Yes, patients have the option to see a next-available provider or choose a specific surgeon for their care. Patients can also request that their primary care provider send a referral to a specialist in a particular location.

When filling out the referral form, you can choose the option of who your patient wants to see.

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Are referral requirements the exact same for every Zone?

Every Zone is different, and these differences are considered. If a Zone requires something specific—like a special lab or diagnostic test—it will be included on the referral pathway so it can be included with the referral.

The goal is to have consistent referral requirements across the province. This helps ensure that referring providers know what types of labs and imaging to submit for their patients. It also prevents surgeon offices from having to ask referring providers to re-submit referrals with appropriate information. It further helps patients, so they are not having to do duplicate labs or imaging, which saves them time and the health system money.

What happens after FAST receives the referral?

The FAST team:

- Checks the referral for duplication and completeness.
- Enters the referral into Alberta Netcare eReferral for tracking and referral management.
- If the referral is complete, they send it to a surgeon's office for triage.
- If the referral is incomplete or does not meet criteria, it will be returned to the referring provider with information on how to move forward.

As a referring provider, where can I see the status of my referral?

You can log into Alberta Netcare and review the status of your referral on your patient's electronic health record using the Clinical Document Viewer (CDV) Tree and/or your My Referrals dashboard. For instructions, go [online](#). If you do not have Alberta Netcare access, please contact the FAST team.

What other tools exist to support referring providers in the referral process?

When making a referral, links to clinical pathways are available in the referral pathways for specific reasons for referral. Clinical pathways are evidence-informed algorithms that help referring providers guide care options for patients with specific health conditions, and are also available via [Alberta's Pathway Hub](#).

Who on the FAST team distributes referrals to surgeon offices?

The FAST team consists of nurses and clerks who do a rapid review of each referral, ensure completeness, and distribute it to surgeon offices based on wait time or location/provider preference.

As a surgeon, what happens after I receive the referral from FAST?

You will triage the referral as typical. Any communication to the referring provider and the patient will come directly from your office (including booking the patient for their consult appointment).

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Data & Reporting

How does data drive FAST?

Referral information is entered into Alberta Netcare eReferral. This information is used to manage referrals and collect data that will help FAST better inform and improve the surgical patient journey by reducing wait times.

If I choose a next-available surgeon, how are they chosen?

FAST uses the referral information collected via Alberta Netcare eReferral to determine who can see a patient for a specific reason for referral within the shortest time possible. A database is available to the FAST team when they need to select who to send the referral to.

Will wait times be reported?

Yes, in time. FAST is currently working on collecting data and will share this information when available.

Why will wait times be reported to the public?

The benefits are two-fold. First, it will help referring providers understand how long their patient might wait for a surgical appointment and provide community supports while they wait. Second, it helps the patient plan their life according to this wait time.

Resources & Support

If I have a question about my referral, who can I contact?

The FAST team is available Monday to Friday to answer any referral-related questions. Call 1-833-553-3278 and choose the extension for the Zone you want to speak with.

If I have a question about FAST in general, who can I contact?

Email ABFAST@ahs.ca and your question will be directed to a Zone-based consultant.

Where can I learn more, share feedback, and forward suggestions for improvement?

Find more information online at ahs.ca/FAST. Feedback, comments or suggestions for improvements can be emailed to ABFAST@ahs.ca.