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DRAFT ARTICLE FOR PHN NEWSLETTERS

New statewide specialist clinic referral criteria launching in public hospitals

From 1 November 2019 all Victorian public hospitals will begin assessing new adult referrals for select core conditions against the statewide referral criteria for three specialties: ENT, Vascular and Urology.

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has developed standardised referral criteria for six specialties in consultation with health services and PHNs.

Implementation of the statewide referral criteria within Victorian hospitals will be gradual, with the first three specialties launching in November 2019 (ENT, Vascular and Urology), followed by Neurology, Gynaecology and Gastroenterology from 1 February 2020.

DHHS are committed to the ongoing development of statewide referral criteria, with an additional five specialties expected to be released throughout 2020.

The statewide referral criteria provide guidance to referring clinicians about which patients will be seen in adult public specialist clinics and what investigations are required to support triage.

Referrals that do not meet the statewide referral criteria are expected to be declined by all Victorian public hospitals. When a referral is declined, referring clinicians should receive correspondence from the health service explaining why the referral has not been accepted.

If a referral is declined due to being incomplete, that is, there is missing essential information, the referring clinician must resubmit the entire referral again in full. Patients will not receive an appointment or be placed on an appropriate waitlist until a complete specialist clinic referral has been received.

The new statewide referral criteria will be available across all Victorian HealthPathways websites (or equivalent online care platform for SEMPHN), alongside related clinical and referral pathways from October 2019. Alternatively, the Statewide referral criteria can be viewed on the official DHHS website at src.health.vic.gov.au.

This project is supported by the Victorian Government

General Practitioners (GPs) and other referring clinicians are encouraged to become familiar with the new statewide referral criteria and to contact their local PHN to gain access to HealthPathways.

Referring clinicians should also consider subscribing to their local PHN newsletter to be notified of new releases of statewide referral criteria.

For more information about the statewide referral criteria and the requirements for General Practice, please visit the [Victorian and Tasmanian PHN Alliance website](#).

KEY MESSAGES

1. Key Messages for GPs/clinical referrers/primary health stakeholders

The following key messages apply to all primary health stakeholders and can be modified to complement the medium and target audience to which they are delivered.

- The Victorian Department of Health and Human services has convened clinical panels to develop statewide specialist clinic referral criteria for select conditions in the following six specialties: ENT, Vascular, Urology, Neurology, Gynaecology and Gastroenterology.
- **From 1 November 2019**, all Victorian public hospitals will be expected to assess new adult referrals for ENT, Vascular and Urology against the statewide referral criteria.
- **From 1 February 2020**, all Victorian public hospitals will be expected to assess new adult referrals for Neurology, Gynaecology and Gastroenterology against the statewide referral criteria.
- The statewide specialist clinic referral criteria make referring to public specialist clinics easier with consistent referral criteria across all Victorian public hospitals.
- Statewide referral criteria only apply to adult public specialist clinics. Referrals that do not meet the criteria because they are either not suitable or are missing essential investigations or information, will be declined and returned to the referrer.
- Patients will not be provided with an appointment or placed on a waiting list unless a complete referral compliant with the statewide referral criteria is received.
- The statewide specialist clinic referral criteria will be available on all Victorian HealthPathways websites. [for SEMPHN – available on the official DHHS website src.health.vic.gov.au]

2. Additional Key Messages

- Health services often have different referral guidelines for specialist clinics, making it complex for GPs to know the necessary referral requirements and suitability of access for their patients.
- The current system for referring to specialist clinics is difficult to navigate and can result in inconsistent access
- Statewide referral criteria will provide clear guidance to referring clinicians about which patients should be seen in specialist clinics.

Preparing for the reform - Call to Action

- Bookmark HealthPathways/DHHS website on your desktop and review the new statewide specialist clinic referral criteria to be ready for their introduction in public hospitals across Victoria from 1 November 2019

3. Key messages about benefits for GPs

- Referring clinicians and patients will have confidence in knowing how and when to access public specialist clinics across Victoria.
- As seen in other states, this reform has the potential to improve the quality and reduce the overall volume of referrals to specialist clinics, leading to reduced wait times and freeing up appointments for those who need specialist services the most.

4. Key messages about HealthPathways (or equivalent)

Each PHN should refer to their own HealthPathways communication plans for specific key messages on the HealthPathways platform. Some HealthPathways key messages that will be relevant for this project and should be considered in individual implementation plans to ensure effective promotion include, 'what is HealthPathways', 'what are the benefits of HealthPathways' (for each audience) and 'how do clinicians access HealthPathways'

5. Background

Development & Purpose of SRC

- The statewide specialist clinic referral criteria have been developed through DHHS convened clinical review panels comprising of primary health representatives and hospital specialists from across Victoria. The statewide criteria are informed by current referral guidelines developed by health services and evidence-based, best-practice assessment and management standards.
- Statewide specialist clinic referral criteria have been developed for selected core conditions within six specialties: ENT, Vascular, Urology, Neurology, Gynaecology and Gastroenterology, and include what information and diagnostics are required to support accurate prioritisation of referrals.
- This work is part of a broader Specialist Clinic Reform Program. DHHS are committed to the ongoing development of statewide referral criteria for core conditions in other surgical and medical specialities.
- Statewide referral criteria are being developed for specialties and core conditions with extended specialist clinic and/or elective surgical waiting times, and where there is strong evidence these conditions can in many cases be effectively managed in primary care.

Access to criteria

- The statewide specialist clinic referral criteria will be available to general practitioners and other referring clinicians via all Victorian HealthPathways websites and the official DHHS website at <http://src.health.vic.gov.au>

Feedback and additional information

- If you have a question that was not answered here and require additional support, please contact **(your phn)** for further assistance.
- Feedback: Visit the official DHHS website (src.health.vic.gov.au/about), or visit your local HealthPathway site to provide feedback on the clinical or referral pathways using the SEND FEEDBACK button located in the top right hand corner of the pathway.

6. Tailored messages for consumers and community members

The following key messages are intended to support community-based practitioners to deliver a consistent message to consumers/community members about the reforms.

Benefits of the statewide referral criteria for patients

- As you know, patients often must wait a long time to see a hospital specialist. This is because sometimes patients are referred to see a hospital specialist before they need to. The criteria makes it clear when it is the right time for your doctor to refer you to a public hospital specialist. This means only people who need a specialist are referred and they can be seen by the doctor sooner.

Explaining the referral requirements to patients

- I think you will need to see a specialist at the hospital about your health problem. Before I refer you to see the specialist doctor, I will need to run some tests. These tests will let the specialist at the public hospital know who you should see and how soon. Without these tests your referral may not be accepted.
- It is important we try to treat your health problem here in the clinic first before we ask for a specialist appointment. Many health problems do not need a specialist and can be safely and easily treated here in the GP clinic. A public hospital will not accept our referral unless we have tried to treat your health problem in the clinic first.

Referral criteria applies to all Victorian hospitals.

- All hospitals in Victoria will not accept a referral for your condition [without these tests/if we have not tried these treatments in the clinic first/at this stage].

When patients are not suitable for a specialist referral

- According to [the results of your tests/ hospital guidelines] you do not need to see a public hospital specialist yet. We can continue to safely treat your health problem here in the clinic. If I refer you to see a public hospital specialist now, the referral will not be accepted.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ([download as .pdf, 368KB](#)):

7. What are the Statewide Referral Criteria (SRC) and why are they being developed?

Health services often have different referral guidelines for specialist clinics, making it complex for GPs to know the necessary referral requirements and suitability of access for their patients.

Statewide referral criteria provide clear guidance to referring clinicians about which patients will be seen in specialist clinics and what investigations are required to support safe and appropriate triage. Statewide referral criteria are shared by all Victorian hospitals, making referral less complex and more equitable.

8. Who decides the Statewide Referral Criteria?

The referral criteria are being developed by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) via Clinical Review Panels. The panel membership comprises of health service Heads of Unit or specialists from across Victoria, health service nursing and allied health clinicians, General Practitioners and GP Liaison Officers.

9. Are there statewide referral criteria for all conditions and specialties?

No. Currently, only 6 specialties have statewide specialist clinic referral criteria and the criteria only apply to **ADULT** specialist clinics. The specialties currently with statewide criteria include:

- | | |
|-------------|---------------------|
| 1. ENT | 4. Neurology |
| 2. Vascular | 5. Gynaecology |
| 3. Urology | 6. Gastroenterology |

Not all presenting conditions will have statewide referral criteria. Statewide referral criteria are being developed for common conditions with extended specialist clinic waiting times and where there is strong evidence that the condition can be effectively managed in primary care.

DHHS are committed to the ongoing development of statewide referral criteria for additional specialties with an additional five specialties currently in development.

4. What does this mean for me as a GP/referring clinician?

From 1 November 2019 all Victorian public hospitals will begin assessing new referrals against the statewide referral criteria for **ENT, Vascular and Urology**. An additional three specialties (Neurology Gynaecology and Gastroenterology) will be introduced in health services **from 1 February 2020**.

5. What happens if I do not use or follow the SRC?

A referral that does not meet the criteria, either because it is not appropriate or there is essential information missing, will be returned to the referrer. Referrers should receive a letter from the health service clearly stating why the referral has been declined.

6. When will the criteria be available and where can I find them?

The new statewide referral criteria, and related clinical and referral pathways, are now available across all Victorian HealthPathways websites (or equivalent). Alternatively, the SRC can be viewed on the official DHHS website at <https://src.health.vic.gov.au>

7. How can I get access to HealthPathways (or equivalent)?

You will need a login to access HealthPathways. Contact your local PHN to request a login or [visit vtpnhna.org.au/carepathways-and-referral](https://vtpnhna.org.au/carepathways-and-referral). For GPs in South Eastern Melbourne, visit your [local PHN website](#).

8. Can I use my practices preferred referral template?

Referrals can be made using your practices preferred referral template. Specific referral forms have not been developed for the program. Referrals will be triaged against the criteria, so long as the referral includes the required information they will be accepted. Details of the criteria can be found here src.health.vic.gov.au or on HealthPathways (or equivalent) visit vtpnhna.org.au/carepathways-and-referral.

9. I want to refer my patient to a public specialist clinic but my patient doesn't meet all the criteria and/or I can't organise the essential tests? What do I do?

The statewide referral criteria will not replace clinical judgement. Referrals may be accepted by health services under exceptional and/or urgent circumstances, despite the criteria not being met.

We suggest firstly reviewing HealthPathways to verify if there is anything more that can be done in your practice to manage your patient's condition. If you strongly believe that all treatment options have been exhausted and/or there are extenuating circumstances for a specialist clinic referral, refer your patient to the appropriate specialist clinic clearly documenting the reasons for the referral.

For additional support you may consider contacting the GP liaison unit at the health service you intend to make the referral to. For urgent referrals, please contact the relevant registrar to discuss your options.

10. The criteria says to refer my patient but I can safely manage them in my GP clinic? Do I have to refer them?

If you can safely manage your patient in the community and do not require specialist advice, you do NOT need to refer them to a public specialist clinic. The criteria provide guidance on what referrals will be accepted by all public hospitals not what SHOULD be referred to see a specialist.

11. My referral has been declined because the referral was incomplete. What do I do?

You will need to submit the entire referral again. Please ensure you include ALL the essential investigations and information as listed in the statewide referral criteria to prevent your referral being declined again.

12. My referral has been declined because I haven't tried certain conservative treatments. Where can I find information of what treatments I should be offering my patient?

Visit your local HealthPathways website or equivalent PHN website. Clinical pathways have been developed for each of the presenting conditions with statewide referral criteria. Each pathway aligns with the criteria and will support GPs to prescribe the necessary treatments and investigations prior to specialist referral.

13. Can I provide feedback on the criteria or pathways?

Yes. Visit the 'About' section on the official DHHS website (src.health.vic.gov.au) for details on how you can provide feedback on the statewide referral criteria. To provide feedback on any clinical or referral pathways on HealthPathways or equivalent PHN website, use the SEND FEEDBACK button located in the top right hand corner of each pathway or contact your local PHN.

If you have a question that was not answered here and require additional support, please contact your local PHN for further assistance.

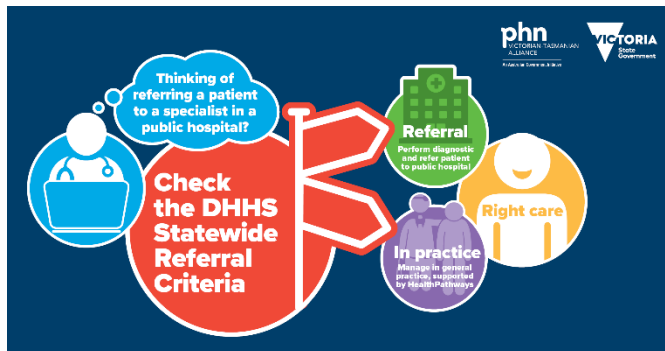
Statewide Referral Criteria (SRC) Tool kit

phn
VICTORIAN-TASMANIAN
ALLIANCE

An Australian Government Initiative

GRAPHICS

Graphics for postcards and social media tiles – [download.zip, 1.4MB](#)



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