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## DRAFT ARTICLE FOR PHN NEWSLETTERS

### **New public hospital referral criteria launch 1 February 2020**

Public specialist clinics across Victoria will start assessing referrals against the second batch of Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) statewide specialist clinic referral criteria from 1 February 2020.

Developed by DHHS, the second batch of criteria includes referrals for selected conditions in Neurology, Gynaecology and Gastroenterology, building on the statewide referral criteria launched last November for selected conditions in ENT, Vascular and Urology. Statewide referral criteria for an additional five specialties; Cardiology, Endocrinology, Rheumatology, Ophthalmology and Obstetrics, are 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 criteria will be declined and returned to the referrer. Referrers should receive a letter clearly stating why the referral has been declined from the health service.

PHNs have been funded to support the adoption of the statewide referral criteria into primary health through inclusion within HealthPathways and online care pathways sites. The new statewide referral criteria for Neurology, Gynaecology and Gastroenterology will be available across all Victorian HealthPathways websites (or equivalent online care platform for SEMPLHN), alongside related clinical and referral pathways from January. Alternatively, the statewide referral criteria can be viewed on the official DHHS website at <https://src.health.vic.gov.au>.

The statewide referral criteria were designed and implemented by DHHS following consultation with the health sector. The consultative clinical review panels provided DHHS with considerations for the reform drawing on the expertise of Heads of Units or specialists from across Victoria, health service nursing and allied health clinicians, GPs and GP Liaison Officers.

This project is supported by the Victorian Government

# Statewide Referral Criteria (SRC) Tool kit

Janelle Devereux, Executive Director of Health Systems Integration, North Western Melbourne PHN said the statewide referral criteria provides greater clarity for GPs and patients about what will and won't be accepted in specialist clinics across Victoria.

“While the setting of access criteria for referral in Victorian public hospitals is not new, consistency across the state promotes greater equity,” Ms Devereux said. “These criteria strive to ensure people receive the right care, in the right place and at the right time, regardless of where they live.”

PHNs are committed to supporting general practice with implementation of this new reform offering support to general practices who are unfamiliar with the new referral criteria and the HealthPathways platform.

PHNs are also using this opportunity to raise awareness of the need to improve communication from hospitals to GPs and patients, and are also advocating for the statewide referral criteria to be extended to include hospital discharge criteria. GPs involvement in the panels further complement this advocacy work done by PHNs, striving for best-practice collaboration, including increasing communication between hospitals and general practice.

For more information about the statewide referral criteria and the requirements for General Practice, please visit the Victorian Tasmanian PHN Alliance website <https://vtphna.org.au>

## KEY MESSAGES

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

The following key messages apply to all primary care stakeholders and can be modified to complement the channel and target audience.

- The Victorian Department of Health and Human Services have released statewide referral criteria for ENT, Vascular, Urology, Neurology, Gynaecology and Gastroenterology.
- **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.
- Statewide referral criteria have been in place since **1 November 2019** for selected conditions in ENT, Vascular and Urology.
- The statewide specialist clinic referral criteria provide clear, consistent criteria across Victorian public hospitals.
- Currently, 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 <http://src.health.vic.gov.au>]

### 2. Additional Key Messages

- Health services often have different referral guidelines for specialist clinics, making it challenging for GPs to know the necessary referral requirements and suitability of access for their patients.
- The current system for referring to specialist clinics can be difficult to navigate and result in inconsistent and inequitable access
- Statewide referral criteria will provide clear guidance to referring clinicians about which patients should be seen in specialist clinics.
- Not all conditions within each specialty have statewide referral criteria. Only the selected conditions within specialties will be assessed against the statewide referral criteria.
- Where statewide referral criteria do not exist, GPs are advised to use the referral criteria set by the relevant hospital.
- The statewide referral criteria will be implemented into health services that have existing specialist clinics. Where a Victorian health service does not have a specialist clinic for a specialty with statewide referral criteria, there is no obligation that a health service will need to start offering such a clinic.

## *Interacting with the reform - Call to Action*

- Bookmark HealthPathways/DHHS website on your desktop and review the newest statewide specialist clinic referral criteria to be ready for their introduction in public hospitals across Victoria from 1 February 2020

### **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 lead to reduced wait times for those who most need access to specialist services.

### **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 consultative clinical review panels comprising of primary care 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 (<https://src.health.vic.gov.au/about>), or visit your local HealthPathways 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

- There can often be long wait times to see a public hospital specialist. One of the reasons for this is that sometimes people are referred to see a hospital specialist before it is necessary. The criteria make 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 be treated by and how quickly you need care. Without these tests your referral may not be accepted.

### Referral criteria applies to all public Victorian hospitals with the relevant specialist clinic.

- Your condition falls under [ENT/Gastroenterology/Gynaecology/Neurology/Urology/Vascular] specialty. The statewide referral criteria are in place for your condition and will apply to any public Victorian hospital that I make your referral to. We will need to try [these tests/treatments in the clinic first/at this stage] before I refer you onto the relevant specialist clinic in a hospital.

### 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.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

### 1. 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 challenging 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 clearer and more equitable.

### 2. Who decides the Statewide Referral Criteria?

The referral criteria are being developed by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) with consultation through 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.

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

No. Currently, only six 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 |

Statewide referral criteria for an additional five specialties; Cardiology, Endocrinology, Rheumatology, Ophthalmology and Obstetrics, are expected to be released throughout 2020. However, not all conditions will have statewide referral criteria. Statewide referral criteria will only be 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.

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

**From 1 February 2020**, selected conditions for Neurology, Gynaecology and Gastroenterology will be assessed against the statewide referral criteria. This follows on from the launch of ENT, Vascular and Urology statewide referral criteria from **1 November 2019**.

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

A referral that does not meet the criteria, either because it does not meet the threshold 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 HealthPathways?

You will need a login to access HealthPathways. Contact your local PHN to request a login or [visit vtpdna.org.au/carepathways-and-referral](http://vtpdna.org.au/carepathways-and-referral)

## 8. 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 first 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.

## 9. The criteria say 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.

## 10. 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.

## 11. 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. 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.

## 12. Can I provide feedback on the criteria?

Yes, visit the 'About' section on the official DHHS website (<https://src.health.vic.gov.au/about>) for details.

*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

## GRAPHICS

Graphics for postcards and social media tiles are available here: <https://vtphna.org.au/our-work/health-system-integration-and-reform-translation/statewide-specialist-clinic-referral-criteria-communications-toolkit/>