

Statewide Referral Criteria (SRC) Communication Toolkit Tranche 3 & 4

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1 DRAFT ARTICLE FOR PHN NEWSLETTERS

Third batch of statewide referral criteria for public specialist clinics to launch 1 May 2021

Public specialist clinics across Victoria will start assessing referrals against the third batch of Victorian Department of Health (DH) statewide specialist clinic referral criteria from 1 May 2021. These provide clear, consistent criteria to help people receive appropriate specialist care in public specialist clinics.

Developed by the Department of Health, this batch of criteria includes selected conditions in Endocrinology, Cardiology, Rheumatology, Ophthalmology and Obstetrics. These build on the previous statewide referral criteria launched for ENT, Vascular Surgery, Urology, Neurology, Gynaecology and Gastroenterology. The statewide referral criteria were designed and implemented by the Department of Health following consultation with the health sector, including Heads of Units or specialists from across Victoria, health service nursing and allied health clinicians, GPs and GP Liaison Officers.

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

Referrers can seek guidance from HealthPathways to:

- Review referral criteria
- support the safe management of patients in primary care when referral to a public specialist clinic has been declined or is not yet indicated.

HealthPathways offers specific clinical advice, including alternate conservative management options and referral pathways such as suitable allied health referral options.

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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 are available across all Victorian HealthPathways websites (or equivalent online care platform for SEMPHN), alongside related clinical and referral pathways. Alternatively, the statewide referral criteria can be viewed on the official DH website at <https://src.health.vic.gov.au>.

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 public 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. This is especially important now, when we are addressing surgical waitlists and risk associated with deferred care caused through COVID.”

“In addition, the supporting clinical and referral pathways on HealthPathways, ensures that patients not suitable for public specialist services will not be disadvantaged but will continue to receive high quality, evidence based, appropriate care in the primary care setting”

PHNs are committed to supporting general practice with implementation of these changes, 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 advocating for the statewide referral criteria to be extended to include hospital discharge criteria.

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>.

Note: PHNs are encouraged to substitute a quote from their equivalent Executive to ensure local relativity/buy-in.

2 KEY MESSAGES

1. PROMOTIONAL KEY MESSAGES

These key messages are designed for use in promotional material such as social media messaging

Message 1: Guide and Educate audience

- From 1 May 2021 referrals for selected conditions in Endocrinology, Cardiology, Rheumatology, Ophthalmology and Obstetrics will be assessed against new statewide referral criteria in all Victorian public specialist clinics.
- The statewide public specialist clinic referral criteria can be easily accessed via the official DH website or through all Victorian HealthPathways websites (or equivalent online care platform for SEMPHN).

Message 2: Explain why the service/product will be beneficial

- Statewide referral criteria provide referring clinicians clear and consistent guidance about which patients will be seen in public specialist clinics across Victoria and what investigations are necessary to support accurate prioritisation of referrals.

Alternate message:

- Clear, consistent referral criteria. Statewide referral criteria now applicable for 10 specialities across all Victorian public specialist clinics.

Message 3: Reassure and Inform. Alleviate fear

- The Victorian statewide referral criteria strive to ensure patients receive the right care in the right place and at the right time.

2. GENERAL KEY MESSAGES

These general key messages are designed to support staff to answer more specific questions about the reform and will cover much more detail than the key messages used for promotional campaigns.

2.1. 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.

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- The Victorian Department of Health have released statewide referral criteria for ENT, Vascular, Urology, Neurology, Gynaecology and Gastroenterology.
- **From 1 May 2021** referrals for selected conditions in Endocrinology, Cardiology, Rheumatology, Ophthalmology and Obstetrics will be assessed against the new statewide referral criteria in all Victorian public specialist clinics.
- 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 SEMPHN’s website [<https://www.semphn.org.au/resources/pathways.html>]]

2.2. 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 will 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 by 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 [for SEMPHN – SEMPHN’s website]/DH website on your desktop so you have easy access to the statewide public specialist clinic referral criteria for 10 specialties.

2.3. 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.

2.4. 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'

3. Background

Development & Purpose of SRC

- The statewide specialist clinic referral criteria have been developed through DH 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 ten specialties: ENT, Vascular, Urology, Neurology, Gynaecology, Gastroenterology, Endocrinology, Cardiology, Rheumatology, Ophthalmology and Obstetrics, 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. DH 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 DH 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 DH 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.

4. 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.

- There are statewide referral criteria in place for your condition that apply to any public Victorian hospital that I make your referral to. We will need to order/try [these tests/treatments in the clinic first/at this stage] before I refer you onto the relevant specialist clinic in a hospital otherwise your referral will not be accepted.

When patients are not suitable for a specialist referral

- According to [the results of your tests/ statewide referral criteria] you do not need to see a public hospital specialist yet. We can continue to safely treat your condition 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 developed by the Victorian Department of Health (DH) 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 ten specialties have statewide specialist clinic referral criteria and the criteria only apply to **ADULT** specialist clinics. The specialties currently with statewide criteria include:

- ENT
- Vascular
- Urology
- Neurology
- Gynaecology
- Gastroenterology
- Endocrinology
- Cardiology
- Rheumatology
- Obstetrics

Not all conditions within each of the above specialties will have statewide referral criteria. Statewide referral criteria have been 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?

All referrals for conditions with statewide referral criteria in ENT, Vascular, Urology, Neurology, Gynaecology and Gastroenterology are currently being assessed against their respective criteria across all Victorian public specialist clinics.

Referrals for select conditions in Endocrinology, Cardiology, Rheumatology, Ophthalmology and Obstetrics will be assessed against their respective statewide referral criteria across all Victorian public specialist clinics from 1 May 2021.

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

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A referral that does not meet the criteria, either because it does not meet the requirements for referral 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 statewide referral criteria for all 10 specialties and supporting clinical and referral pathways are now available across all Victorian HealthPathways websites (or SEMPHN's website). Alternatively, they can also be viewed on the official DH 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 vtphna.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 public 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.

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12. How do I provide feedback on the criteria?

Please email any feedback about the referral criteria directly to DH at specialistclinics.policypenquiries@dhhs.vic.gov.au.

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

A PDF copy of the FAQs is available on the [Statewide Referral Criteria - Communications page](#) on the VTPHNA website.

3 GRAPHICS

Graphics for postcards and social media tiles are available on the [Statewide Referral Criteria - Communications page](#) on the VTPHNA website.

Please note – Post cards are formatted for printing, by each PHN. The generic PDF includes a space for PHNs to add their HealthPathways logo on the back.

4 SOCIAL MEDIA MESSAGES (UNPAID)

Social media messages are available on the [Statewide Referral Criteria - Communications page](#) on the VTPHNA website.

5 PAID SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE

NWMPHN will run paid social media and google ads campaigns statewide on behalf of all PHNs, using statewide communication and marketing project funding. Where internal budget allows, PHNs are encouraged to also undertake paid social media coverage. Guidance for paid social media is available on the [Statewide Referral Criteria - Communications page](#) on the VTPHNA website.