

Endoscopy ‘Companion’ Statewide specialist referral criteria

FAQs

1. WHAT ARE THE ‘COMPANION’ STATEWIDE REFERRAL CRITERIA (SRC) FOR DIAGNOSTIC COLONOSCOPY AND GASTROSCOPY AND WHY WERE THEY DEVELOPED?

The Victorian Department of Health has developed new ‘companion’ statewide referral criteria to enable direct access to colonoscopy and gastroscopy for category one patients for these selected indications:

- [positive faecal occult blood test \(FOBT\) – diagnostic colonoscopy](#)
- [dysphagia – diagnostic gastroscopy](#).

These criteria came into effect from 1 February 2024.

These criteria are designed to reduce overall wait times for these procedures by enabling direct access to diagnostic colonoscopy and gastroscopy for eligible category one patients.

When a referring GP uses the new criteria to refer a patient to a public hospital that is using a streamlined access model, patients can be placed directly onto the wait list for their procedure without needing to wait for an outpatient appointment.

2. WHO DEVELOPED THIS NEW STATEWIDE REFERRAL CRITERIA?

The new criteria were developed by a clinical review panel of GPs and hospital-based clinicians, who have expertise working with affected patients. In addition, the new criteria were developed where there are identical indications for the procedure in the [Victorian Colonoscopy categorisation guidelines](#) or the [Upper gastrointestinal endoscopy categorisation guidelines for adults](#), national guidelines and the Medicare Benefits Schedule.

3. WHERE CAN I FIND THE NEW 'COMPANION' SRC FOR ENDOSCOPIC PROCEDURES?

The statewide referral criteria are available across all Victorian HealthPathways websites. Alternatively, they can all be viewed on the official DH website at <https://src.health.vic.gov.au> under the specialty 'Gastroenterology'.

You will need a login to access HealthPathways. Contact your local PHN to request a login or visit <https://vtphna.org.au/care-pathways-and-referral/>

4. WHAT HAPPENS IF I DO NOT USE THESE NEW 'COMPANION' SRC?

Unlike SRC for other conditions and specialities, it's important to note that the use of these new 'companion' criteria for endoscopic procedures **is not** mandatory.

If you chose to not use these criteria and opt to use the gastroenterology SRC instead, the patient will be waitlisted for a specialist clinic appointment rather than being placed directly on the waitlist for a procedure, assuming the referral is accurate and complete.

5. WHY DO THESE 'COMPANION' CRITERIA EXPECT SO MUCH MORE INFORMATION FROM THE REFERRER?

When a referring GP uses these new 'companion' criteria to refer a patient to a public hospital that is using a streamlined access model, patients can be placed directly onto the wait list for their procedure without needing to wait for an outpatient appointment.

This is why more information is needed in referrals – to support the assessment of anaesthetic and bleeding risk as well as risk factors for poor bowel preparation. The criteria also offer referring clinicians the option to choose between referral for an endoscopic procedure, or referral to a specialist clinic based on what they know about the patient's needs.

6. I WANT MY PATIENT TO BE SEEN BY A GASTROENTEROLOGIST PRIOR TO HAVING A PROCEDURE? DO I USE THESE NEW 'COMPANION' SRC?

No. Use the gastroenterology statewide referral criteria for the relevant presenting condition (e.g. [rectal bleeding](#), [persistent iron deficiency](#) and [dysphagia](#)). Patients will then be reviewed in a specialist clinic prior to a colonoscopy or gastroscopy.

7. 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.

8. WHERE CAN I FIND CLINICAL ADVICE THAT MAY HELP ME DECIDE WHETHER I REFER DIRECTLY FOR A PROCEDURE OR REQUEST A SPECIALIST CLINIC APPOINTMENT FIRST?

GPs and other primary care providers should check their local HealthPathways or care pathways website (GPHN and SEMPHN) when considering a referral.

9. HOW DO I PROVIDE FEEDBACK ON THE CRITERIA?

Please email any feedback about the referral criteria directly to DH at specialistclinics.policyenquiries@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.