

# FACILITATING THE TIMELINESS AND APPROPRIATENESS OF REFERRALS FROM THE SHORT STAY UNIT TO OUTPATIENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES



**Editor’s Summary:** In *Facilitating the timeliness and appropriateness of Referral from the Short Stay Unit to Outpatient Mental Health Services*, Alberta Health Services describes a pilot project in which a centralized intake service is implemented for mental health. A liaison staff member helps process referrals and helps to gather and disseminate referral information. The liaison attends the unit rounds and is available to staff through out the week. This allows the staff liaison member to develop a better understanding of regional service needs and service availability in the community. The pilot includes an evaluation process.

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<b>Purpose:</b>	For the acute care short-stay unit the timely processing of referrals is important and the wide array of community outpatient services can make it difficult for the short-stay service providers to quickly navigate the mental health system, understand referral processes and to connect clients with appropriate community services. There are a number of factors that can cause referrals from the short-stay unit from being made and responded to in a timely fashion. These difficulties ultimately cause less than optimal patient transition and flow from the short-stay unit to community services.
<b>Resources:</b>	Operating \$: ____ FTEs: __0.6__
<b>Source of resource:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>In kind</i> contributions from the organization <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dedicated internal funding <input type="checkbox"/> External funding (example grant, Ministry etc.)
<b>Population group:</b>	An adult acute care short-stay unit.

<b>Patient flow entry and end points:</b>	From the short-stay unit to community outpatient services.
<b>Description/ approach:</b>	A centralized intake service (Access Mental Health) has initiated a three-month pilot project to make a staff member available to liaison with the short stay unit. The liaison staff member helps process referrals, and gather and disseminate referral information. The liaison is attending the short stay unit rounds on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and is available to the unit staff throughout the week by telephone. Through the provision of the Access Mental Health Liaison worker it is anticipated that the short stay unit staff will receive more timely information regarding the most appropriate referral options for their patients. In addition, it is anticipated that there will be an increased understanding of community service referral processes, which will result in a quicker transfer of needed information and quicker admission decisions. These outcomes will result in a smoother transition of patients from inpatient to outpatient services and will result in decreased requests for additional referral information, more appropriate referrals and fewer declined referrals.
<b>Measurement approach:</b>	The following process, satisfaction and outcome measures are being used to evaluate the project and measure the impact of the initiative on patient flow and referral procedures.  (1) Implementation/Process Measurement (Liaison Daily Activity Log)  (2) Short Stay Unit Staff Satisfaction and Feedback (Post-only Survey)  (3) Liaison Impact on Referral Processes (Pre-Post Survey)  (4) Liaison Worker Satisfaction and Feedback Survey (Post-only Survey)
<b>Limiting factors:</b>	In order to sustain or expand this initiative beyond its current pilot project status there will need to be a commitment to increase the resources necessary to make Access Mental Health Liaison workers available to the acute care units.