

“LINK provided me with immediate advice that I could use to improve the care of my patient... The LINK specialist took time to explain the rationale behind his advice and even advised on next steps to consider. I am now confident that I can apply the same advice to future patients as well.”
- Saskatchewan Family Physician

For more information on LINK:
LINK@health.gov.sk.ca



LINK The “VIRTUAL” Physician Lounge

LINK connects primary care providers and specialists

Leveraging Immediate Non-urgent Knowledge, or LINK, is a **telephone consultation service** to give primary care providers and their patients rapid access to specialists to discuss less serious patient conditions.

LINK benefits patients, primary care providers, specialists and the health system

- LINK supports **patient-centred care** by providing patients with access to specialist expertise within the context of a primary care visit. This helps avoid unnecessary referrals and reduce travel and cost for rural patients.
- **Primary care providers** gain from the educational experience and are supported to work to their full scope of practice.
- **Specialists** should notice that they receive more appropriate referrals with relevant diagnostics.
- The **health system** gains by more appropriate use of clinical resources (e.g., referrals, treatments, diagnostics and prescriptions).

Available 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM, Monday - Friday, excluding statutory holidays

Specialties providing the LINK service:

Adult Psychiatry

Palliative Care

Nephrology

HIV and HCV

Child Psychiatry (starting 2018/09/17)

Call: 1-844-855-LINK (5465)

A provincial service

Specialists participating in LINK will take calls from primary care providers from anywhere in the province. All primary care providers can use LINK. Using LINK is voluntary and is not intended to replace existing relationships.

An educational and collegial conversation

LINK provides a friendly environment for primary care providers to consult specialist colleagues. The specialist is expected to answer the primary care provider's clinical questions in a collegial manner. The call should be educational for the primary care provider so the knowledge shared can be applied to similar patient situations.

Specialties selection

Specialties will be recruited based on demand from primary care providers and interest from specialty groups.

Remuneration

Fee-for-service specialists are paid \$25 per LINK call answered.

Non-fee-for-service and contract specialists and primary care providers are not compensated separately for LINK.

- For non-fee-for-service and contract specialists, answering LINK calls can form part of their contract deliverables.
- For primary care providers, LINK is a support tool to help them develop an appropriate patient care plan.

For Primary Care Providers

Requesting a LINK call

Call 1-844-855-LINK (5465). As soon as the call is answered, inform the operator that you are requesting a LINK call.

Acute Care Access Line (ACAL) connects LINK calls to specialists and documents the calls

ACAL

- Connects LINK calls to the specialist on-call;
- Records the calls;
- Documents the call using a LINK Call Log form including a short survey to get the primary care provider's opinion on the call's impact to help evaluate the program; and
- Sends the call log to the specialist.

The information gathered from the LINK Call Log form helps to:

- Identify demand for specific clinical supports; and
- Evaluate the service and identify improvements.

The LINK service is complementary to the urgent phone service. There will be no change to the urgent/emergent phone services supported by ACAL.

No change to referral patterns

LINK is not intended to affect referral patterns. The specialist on call is not expecting to receive direct referrals as a result of providing the LINK service. If a referral is warranted, primary care providers will follow their existing referral practice.

For Specialists

Number of specialists needed in a specialty

Usually, three or four specialists are required to be available.

Try to answer calls while the patient is still there

Calls should be answered as quickly as possible when the patient may still be in the primary care provider's office or can be returned at a time convenient to both parties.

Call length

Both Saskatchewan and other jurisdictions with similar types of service find that calls typically last about 10-15 minutes.