

Preventative Health Testing (PHT): Practice Advice for Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners

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Purpose

This practice advice supports Registered Nurses (RNs) and Nurse Practitioners (NPs) in understanding their professional responsibilities related to patient-ordered preventative health testing (herein referred to as PHT) in Alberta. It provides guidance on patient-ordered preventative health testing, clinical decision-making, patient education, follow-up care, and documentation. An RN or NP may be involved as the practitioner providing, receiving, reviewing, coordinating, or following up PHT only where the activity is within their individual scope, competence, authorization, and practice setting.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with applicable legislation, regulations, employer policies when indicated, and College standards.

Registrants are expected to exercise professional judgment, practise within their competence, and provide care that is evidence-informed, patient-centred, and consistent with professional and legal requirements

Legislative and Regulatory Framework

The Government of Alberta (GoA) has established a legislative framework, the Preventative Health Testing Services Regulation (Alta Reg 193/2026), that permits eligible patients to access specified preventative diagnostic imaging services through patient self-referral. The legislation specifically clarifies that a self-referral for PHT does not constitute an order or prescription.

PHTs are not insured health services. Individuals are responsible for payment at the time of service. PHTs are not intended to replace or bypass medically necessary care provided through the publicly funded system. As such PHT services do not include medically necessary diagnostic testing ordered as part of;

- diagnostic testing ordered to investigate symptoms,
- ongoing monitoring of known health conditions,
- public screening programs established by Alberta Health, and
- occupational or third-party requested testing.

Reimbursement may be available where the requirements of the PHT Services Benefits Regulation are met, including a new clinical finding of cancer.

UNDERSTANDING PHT

Preventative health testing involves investigations performed on individuals who are seeking information about their health status.

The goal of preventative health testing may include:

- early identification of disease,
- identification of risk factors,
- informing future healthcare decisions, and
- supporting preventative health strategies.

However, preventative health testing has limitations. Testing may identify findings that:

- do not represent disease,
- would never have affected the person's health,
- require additional testing to clarify significance,
- create anxiety or uncertainty,

- result in unnecessary investigations, or
- delay attention to more appropriate evidence-based screening approaches.

PHT should therefore be considered within the context of the patient's overall health, risk factors, family history, values, and goals.

SERVICES THAT CAN BE PROVIDED THROUGH PHT

The [Alberta Preventative Health Testing Medical Imaging Exam Catalogue](#) identifies the diagnostic imaging services that may be offered at accredited diagnostic imaging facilities.

- Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)
- Computed Tomography (CT)
- Ultrasound
- Xray

Excluded services:

- services requiring sedation or anesthesia are excluded
- Laboratory testing

Facility participation in PHT is not mandatory. As a result, the availability of PHT services may differ across facilities.

PATIENT REIMBURSEMENT BY GOA

A registrant must inform the patient that reimbursement by the GoA is not guaranteed. Providers are not responsible for determining or guaranteeing reimbursement and should direct patients to GoA resources for information about reimbursement eligibility, rates and application requirements.

For GoA reimbursement to be payable, the PHT must meet specified requirements, including that:

- the service was performed in Alberta;
- the service was performed by a regulated health provider authorized by their college to provide it;
- the service was included in the Schedule of Preventative Health Testing Services when performed;

- the diagnostic testing results were made accessible by the regulated health professional through the Alberta Electronic Health Record (EHR);
- applicable age or guardian-consent requirements were met; and
- a new clinical finding of cancer was established in relation to the patient (who is a resident of Alberta).

Where a patient is entitled to claim reimbursement from an insurer, the patient must first submit the claim to that insurer. GoA is the payor of last resort.

A claim for benefits must be received within 365 days after the patient receives the clinical finding of cancer.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR PHT?

Patients may request PHT services through self-referral. Before providing a PHT service, a regulated health-care professional must assess the patient, determine that they meet the eligibility and clinical requirements outlined in the [Preventative Health Services Testing Regulations](#), and confirm that the requested service is safe and clinically appropriate.

To be eligible for a PHT the patient must:

- Be 18 years of age or older; or
- Be under 18 years of age with consent provided by a legal guardian; and,
- Provide written consent for the disclosure of their personal and health information, or have written consent provided on their behalf by a legal guardian or authorized decision maker when they are a minor or lack capacity.

As part of the assessment, the regulated healthcare professional must consider:

- the patient's reason/health concern for seeking the PHT and whether the PHT service will address their reason for self-referral;
- health history;
- relevant risk factors and contraindications; and
- whether the individual demonstrates an informed understanding of the purpose of the PHT, its limitations, potential side effects, and risks.

A registrant must not provide PHT if they determine that the service is duplicative, clinically inappropriate or if doing so would contravene a condition, restriction or limitation that applies to the provision of the requested PHT.

The [AHCIP Bulletin GEN 162](#) states that a regulated health professional may decline a requested PHT where, based on the patient's health history, clinical circumstances or the practitioner's professional expertise, the test is not considered appropriate or safe.

Non-Residents of Alberta

PHT services may be accessed by non-residents of Alberta through self-referral, provided all eligibility requirements are met. Non-residents are not eligible for reimbursement under the Government of Alberta PHT program.

Disclosure of patient information

A registrant must not provide a PHT service to an individual unless the individual or a legal guardian provides written consent to the disclosure of the individual's information, including personal and health information in accordance with the PHTSR. This includes informing the patient that test results and related reports will become part of the Alberta EHR.

The written consent must include;

- the authorization of the registrant or operator to disclose the patient's information specified in the consent, including the following;
 - the patient's name
 - date of birth
 - contact information, including phone number, mailing address and email address if any
 - valid personal health number
 - the type of PHT service provided the diagnostic testing results identified as the result of the PHT and any clinical finding of cancer
 - the date the PHT service was provided
 - The patient's insurer if any
 - The patient's invoice or record of payment

The purpose for which the information may be disclosed

- The identity of the persons to whom the information may be disclosed including
- the patient or a legal guardian providing consent on behalf of the patient
- any regulated member responsible for the patient's follow up care
- the Minister

Acknowledge that the person providing consent has been made aware of

- the reasons for collecting the information and
- the risks, benefits if consent is provided or refused

the effective date

an expiry date if applicable

a statement that consent may be revoked at any time

A registrant may only disclose information in accordance with the terms of the consent provided

Documentation and Communicating Results

The Regulation requires (Alta Reg 193/2026) that after an MRI, CT, ultrasound, or xray PHT has been performed, the regulated healthcare professional providing the PHT must communicate the diagnostic testing results to the patient

- in person
- at the testing facility
- within 2 hours

The communication requirement applies to the specified imaging services and the facility offering this service must have appropriate policy and procedure in place to meet this obligation.

If the results indicate the need for follow up care the regulated healthcare professional performing the PHT must

- Provide information to the patient on appropriate next steps
- Facilitate any required consultations with other regulated healthcare professionals related to the follow up care
- Facilitate any referrals or health services to other regulated healthcare professional required for follow up care

GoA guidance states that providers are expected to have follow-up pathways in place before offering PHT.

Regulated health professionals are responsible for ensuring resources are available to interpret PHT results and provide follow-up care for patients without a primary care provider or other regulated health professional.

Registrants are responsible for ensuring documentation is accurate, complete, and completed in a timely manner in accordance with the CRNA Documentation Standards. Documentation must include informed consent, required attestations, relevant clinical findings, assessments, and actions.

Reporting requirements

PHT service results must be uploaded to the EHR. Once uploaded, test results and related reports become part of the patient's EHR.

Registrants considerations for patients presenting with PHT results outside of the testing facility

Patients should be made aware of their PHT results within the testing facility with a plan for follow up care. Should the patient for some reason present to the registrant with a PHT result with an abnormality, the NP has a due diligence to follow up on the PHT result as they would with publicly funded testing.

The NP registrant should consider:

- the patient's overall wellbeing,
- clinical assessment findings,
- whether findings require additional testing,
- the clinical significance of identified abnormalities,
- evidence-informed management options,
- referral needs,
- continuity of care requirements.

The RN registrant should assess and respond to the patient's needs within RN scope of practice, including,

- communicate and/or escalate urgent concerns,
- collaborate with an appropriate provider, and

document the actions taken.

References

College of Physician and Surgeons of Alberta [AP_Patient-Ordered-Testing.pdf](#)

Government of Alberta Preventative Health Testing Services Benefits Regulation:
[Preventative Health Testing Services Benefits Regulation - Open Government](#)

Government of Alberta [GEN Bulletin 162](#)

Government of Alberta [Patient Choice and Self-Referral for Preventative Health Testing](#)

Government of Alberta [Preventative health testing | Alberta.ca](#)

Government of Alberta [PHT Guidance for Community-Based Healthcare Settings](#)

Government of Alberta [Alberta Preventative Health Testing Medical Imaging Exam Catalogue](#)