

## Statewide specialist referral criteria

# FAQs

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### 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 there are 15 specialties that have statewide specialist clinic referral criteria. The specialties currently with statewide criteria include:

- Cardiology
- Chronic Pain
- Gastroenterology (incl scopes)
- ENT
- Long COVID
- General Surgery (Plastics/Breast)
- Gynaecology
- Joint Pain
- Endocrinology
- Neurology
- Obstetrics
- Ophthalmology
- Rheumatology
- Urology
- Vascular

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.

This project is supported by the Victorian Government

Referrals are currently being assessed against statewide referral criteria across all Victorian public specialist clinics, for the specialties listed above.

New General Surgery criteria for breast conditions will be implemented in Victorian Specialist Clinics from 1 June 2024, with additional statewide referral criteria being launched late in 2024 for respiratory and general surgery.

#### 4. WHAT HAPPENS IF I DO NOT USE OR FOLLOW THE SRC?

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.

#### 5. WHERE CAN I FIND THE SRC AND HOW DO I GET ACCESS TO HEALTHPATHWAYS?

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>

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/>

#### 6. 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.

## **7. 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.

## **8. 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.

## **10. 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.

## **11. 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](mailto: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.