What is primary care?
Primary care refers to the services you receive for your basic, everyday health needs. It is your first point of contact within the health care system and is provided to you by your family doctor and other health professionals. It includes the initial care, treatment and follow-up of various conditions as well as referrals to the rest of the health system as appropriate. It also encompasses the promotion of wellness, and prevention and management of chronic diseases and injuries.

What is a Primary Care Network?
Primary Care Networks are a made-in-Alberta approach to ensure that you receive the right care, from the right health professional, at the right time. Led by family doctors, these Networks are improving access to, and better co-ordinating, care for Albertans.

In a Primary Care Network, a team of health professionals led by family doctors delivers and co-ordinates health services, resulting in better collaboration, more timely referrals and more comprehensive care. A Network can be one clinic with many family doctors and other health professionals (i.e. nurse practitioners, dietitians, pharmacists, social workers and mental health workers), or many family doctors and other health professionals in several clinics in a geographic area.

Each Network provides basic primary care but also sets priorities designed to meet local health needs. Networks are established within a framework set by Alberta Health and Wellness, Alberta Medical Association and Alberta Health Services.

What are the benefits of having a family doctor who is part of a Primary Care Network?
There are several benefits to having a family doctor who is a member of a Network.

Accessing the right care, from the right professional, at the right time
Through collaboration and communication between your family doctor and the Primary Care Network team, you’ll receive the right care, from the right professional, at the right time. Ultimately, you, your family doctor and the Network team become partners to better manage your health.

...continued on page 2
Quick Facts about Primary Care Networks

- Primary Care Networks are a result of a joint initiative between Alberta Health and Wellness, Alberta Medical Association and Alberta Health Services.

- The first Primary Care Network was launched in 2005. There are more than 40 Networks involving over 2000 family doctors, hundreds of health professionals (i.e. nurses, dietitians, pharmacists, social workers, mental health specialists and many others) serving more than 2.5 million Albertans.

- More Primary Care Networks are in the planning stages.

Co-ordination of your care
In a Primary Care Network, your family doctor can provide you with faster and easier access to needed resources provided by the Network’s multi-disciplinary team. If the services you need are not provided by your Network, the team will identify the right external resource and co-ordinate a referral as part of the management of your overall health care.

Taking control of your health care
When your family doctor is a member of a Network, you can become better engaged in your primary care. You will benefit from timely referrals to other health professionals and you are still free to make your own choices about managing your health care.

The goals of Primary Care Networks are to:

- Co-ordinate management of access to appropriate primary health care, 24/7.
- Increase the number of Albertans with ready access to primary care.
- Co-ordinate and integrate health services including specialized and long-term care through specialty-care linkages to primary care.
- Increase emphasis on health promotion, thus strengthening support for Albertans with complex medical conditions and chronic diseases, and disease and injury prevention.
- Facilitate greater use of multi-disciplinary teams to provide comprehensive primary care.

All Primary Care Networks will provide some or all of the following services, depending on local needs:

- Basic ambulatory care and follow-up
- Care of complex health problems and follow-up
- Psychological counselling
- Chronic disease screening and prevention (heart disease, diabetes, etc.)
- Family planning and pregnancy counselling
- Child health care (prenatal, post-natal and school health care, etc.)
- Obstetrical care
- End-of-life care
- Geriatric care (seniors’ wellness, residential long-term care)
- Care of chronically ill patients
- Minor surgery
Frequently asked questions

Can I keep my current family doctor?
Absolutely. However, to receive care from a Primary Care Network, your family doctor must be a member of one. In fact, your family doctor leads the Network’s team in the management of your overall health care.

Can I use a Primary Care Network of my choice?
You can only access the Primary Care Network to which your family doctor belongs.

What if I don’t have a family doctor?
It is important to have a family doctor for timely and co-ordinated access to primary care. Contact Health Link Alberta, 1-866-408-LINK (5465), or online at healthlinkalberta.ca for assistance in finding a family doctor who is accepting new patients.

How do I find out if my family doctor is part of a Primary Care Network?
Ask at your next visit to your family doctor or call Health Link Alberta at 1-866-408-LINK (5465) or visit albertapci.ca.

My family doctor is not part of a Primary Care Network. Will I have the same access to health services?
All family doctors, whether or not they are members of a Primary Care Network, have access to specialized health services and the ability to make referrals. The difference is that in a Network, patients have ready access to all health professionals on the Network team.

With so many changes to the health care system over the past 15 years, how do I know the Primary Care Network model will be long term?
There have been many Primary Care Network success stories! This innovative approach to delivering primary care, along with other initiatives introduced by the Alberta Government over the last decade, is part of a long-term strategy to ensure all Albertans have access to family physicians and other health professionals when they need it.

All Primary Care Networks will provide some or all of the following services, depending on local needs:

• Basic ambulatory care and follow-up
• Care of complex health problems and follow-up
• Psychological counselling
• Chronic disease screening and prevention (heart disease, diabetes, etc.)
• Family planning and pregnancy counselling
• Child health care (prenatal, post-natal and school health care, etc.)
• Obstetrical care
• End-of-life care
• Geriatric care (seniors’ wellness, residential long-term care, etc.)
• Care of chronically ill patients
• Minor surgery
• Minor emergency care
• Primary inpatient care at hospitals and long-term care facilities
• Rehabilitative care
• Information management
• Population health
• Management of access to appropriate primary care services, 24/7
• Access to laboratory and diagnostic imaging
• Co-ordination of home care, emergency room service, long-term care, secondary care and public health
• Assisting patients, without a family doctor, to become attached to a doctor and receive care

I have more questions. Where can I get more information?
Visit albertapci.ca or contact Health Link Alberta for more information about Primary Care Networks and/or how to connect with a family doctor.

Toll free: 1-866-408-LINK (5465)
Edmonton: 780-408-LINK (5465)
Calgary: 403-943-LINK (5465)
We took baby steps, but they have helped me learn what I need to do to make a difference. When I have a setback, they help me get back on track.

Nancy Jo Morin, patient, Edmonton Oliver Primary Care Network