

State-wide Referral Criteria for NSW Health Outpatient Services

Project Brief



Background

The NSW Ministry of Health, in partnership with the Agency for Clinical Innovation, is facilitating the development of State-wide Referral Criteria (SRC) for NSW Health specialist outpatient services.

SRC are clinical decision support tools that transparently and consistently communicate minimum clinical criteria to access public specialist outpatient services as well as minimum clinical and referral information to ensure safe, timely and effective triage.

This project aligns with the [NSW Health Outpatient Services Framework](#) and mirrors the development of SRC for public specialist outpatient services in Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia.

The aim of SRC is to facilitate safe, timely and effective referral and prioritisation of patients requiring access to NSW Health specialist outpatient services.

Case for change

Presently within NSW, there is significant variation in the content and availability of information for General Practitioners (GPs) and other referring health practitioners to help inform referral to NSW Health specialist outpatient services.

Objective criteria for determining access and prioritisation are often lacking or inconsistent which increases the complexity of referring to NSW Health specialist outpatient services and impedes equitability of access.

Outpatient services currently report challenges with the quality and appropriateness of some referrals as well as patients' readiness for care at the initial consultation.

SRC are intended to support patients and referring health practitioners when issuing referrals as well as NSW Health specialist outpatient services at the point of screening and triage.

With the development of SRC, there is an opportunity to help ensure that:

- The criteria used by NSW Health specialist outpatient services to accept and triage outpatient referrals are transparent and consistent
- Patients who may be optimally managed in primary care (or require Emergency care) are identified and streamlined to appropriate care early, and do not wait unnecessarily on outpatient waitlists
- Referrals to NSW Health specialist outpatient services contain all the required information for safe, timely and effective triage
- Patients are ready for care at their initial consultation.

Methodology

The development of SRC for NSW Health specialist outpatient services will be largely modelled upon the methodology successfully employed in Queensland and Victoria. A critical element of this approach is the collaboration between referring health practitioners, medical/surgical specialists, and other key stakeholders throughout the development process.

In brief:

1. Existing referral criteria for a given specialty and common clinical presentations are identified and collated.
2. A Clinical Advisory Group is established for each specialty, comprised of a multi-disciplinary team of referring health practitioners/GPs, medical/surgical specialists, nursing and allied health professionals, and other key stakeholders.
3. The Clinical Advisory Group work collaboratively to draft SRC that encompasses:
 - a. Minimum referral/prioritisation criteria for access to NSW Health specialist outpatient services
 - b. Conditions / presenting problems not routinely seen by NSW Health specialist outpatient services
 - c. Emergency criteria
 - d. Essential and desirable referral information
4. SRC are circulated for wider consultation and feedback.
5. SRC are finalised and endorsed by the Clinical Advisory Group.
6. SRC are published on a public-facing website and integrated into HealthPathways and e-Referrals.

Scope

Phase 1 of the project will focus on the development of SRC for selected conditions / presenting problems within the specialties of Ophthalmology, Gastroenterology, Ear, Nose & Throat (ENT) and Orthopaedics. These specialties have been selected based on the high volume of activity within NSW Health outpatient services, availability of SRC in Queensland and/or Victoria, and presence of referral criteria within NSW HealthPathways.

Further information

This project is being managed by the System Purchasing Branch of the NSW Ministry of Health.

For further information, please contact:

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