

Staying Connected: Virtual Support and Visitation

Technology provides us with great ways to stay in touch, and a number of options exist to allow you to connect with family and friends in Alberta Health Services (AHS) care settings. During COVID-19, to support the health and safety of patients, families, staff and physicians, we strongly encourage you to consider virtual visitation as an alternative to in-person visits.

This is especially encouraged:

- for patients who will be having short hospital stays
- to reduce frequency and length of face-to-face contact with patients
- to reduce loneliness and isolation of patients and residents
- when restrictions to designated support and/or visitation limit in-person contact

Staff can help patients, residents and families to:

- Decide when virtual visitation should be considered, based on discussions of patient/resident needs and risk related to in-person contact.
- Connect to free public WiFi available in many AHS facilities.
- Locate a space where they can speak privately if necessary.
- Set up calls or online meetings to ensure family/support persons can partner in care planning when they can't be there in person.

Things for patients and families to remember:

- Their own device (if available) – cell phone or tablet
- Their own charger (if available)
- Headphones (with built-in microphone)
- Screen disinfectant wipes
- Installed messaging apps of your choice (see following page for options)
- Installed entertainment apps
- Downloaded media content - e.g. movies, TV shows, etc. as WiFi at sites may not allow download or streaming.

For unplanned admissions and for continuing care residents, families are encouraged to help patients and residents to get these items.

Did You Know?

If you don't have your own electronic device, many AHS sites have tablets that can be used by patients and residents to connect with friends and family. Ask the care team for details.

Patient Well Wishes

You can brighten the day of a friend or family member currently in hospital by sending them a message through [Patient Well Wishes](#). Your kind words of encouragement will be delivered by staff and/or volunteers at AHS and Covenant Health facilities.

Technology options for staying connected:

- A **phone call** to family and friends is often the simplest way to keep in touch. Ask the care team about access to phones if you do not have your own cell phone.
- **Text messages** are a good option if you have your own cell phone with a data plan, and are unable to talk, or if you prefer to written communication. It is a good option to share private information that you prefer others don't hear, or during quiet times when others around you are resting.
- **Email** is great if you like written communication and want to connect and share information, but don't need an immediate response.
- **Video messaging** apps allow you to make a video call so that you can have a virtual face to face interaction. Some apps often come preinstalled on your smartphone including:



FaceTime
(Apple)



Google Duo
(Android)

There are a variety of additional messaging apps you can download to your personal smartphone or tablet through the App Store (Apple) or Google Play (Android) including:



Facebook Messenger



Skype



Google Meets



Zoom



WhatsApp



Discord



Signal

These services offer free basic accounts, you may incur data charges if you are using your cellular service instead of WiFi.

Not into tech, or needing a change? Try out some of these alternatives:

- Keep a photo or two in your room that brings you joy (e.g. family, friends, pets, etc.).
- Bring headphones and a device to listen to your favorite music or audiobook.
- Post handmade cards, pictures, etc.
- Watch the same movie or read the same book as your family member or friend.
- Send handwritten cards or letters.
- Bring crafts from kids/grandkids.