NSW Health

# Statewide referral criteria for NSW public outpatient services

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is Statewide Referral Criteria?

Statewide Referral Criteria (SRC) is a clinical decision-support tool that communicates the minimum information required for referrals issued to NSW public specialist outpatient services to enable safe, timely and effective triage. SRC is intended to support referring health professionals when issuing referrals as well as NSW public specialist outpatient services at the point of screening and triage.

### What are the five components of Statewide Referral Criteria?

The five components of Statewide Referral Criteria include:

- **Emergency** – Clinical presentations or 'red flags' where referring health professionals should consider redirecting the patient to an Emergency Department or urgent care service, or seeking medical advice (e.g. phone on-call medical practitioner). These criteria should not be used by referring health professionals to refer to NSW public specialist outpatient services.
- **Out of scope (not routinely provided)** – Symptoms, conditions, and/or presentations that would not routinely be provided by NSW public specialist outpatient services (i.e. could be optimally and safely managed in primary care or alternative care setting). These criteria acknowledge and permit exceptions, where clinically appropriate.
- **Access and prioritisation** – Symptoms, conditions, and/or presentations that advise referring health professionals, clinicians, patients and carers suitability for management by NSW public specialist outpatient services. These criteria are classified by expected clinical urgency category and clinically recommended timeframes to be seen for a new outpatient appointment (i.e. Category 1: within 30 days, Category 2: within 90 days, Category 3: within 365 days). These criteria are only applicable where NSW public specialist outpatient services exist and manage the identified presenting condition.
- **Required information** – Mandatory information that is to be supplied with referrals to NSW public specialist outpatient services for specific symptoms, conditions and/or presentations. These criteria support the determination of an appropriate clinical urgency category.
- **Additional information (if available)** – Optional information that can be supplied with referrals to NSW public specialist outpatient services for specific symptoms, conditions and/or presentations. These criteria support with the determination of an appropriate clinical urgency category, however, are not required to continue referral processing.

### How are Statewide Referral Criteria developed?

The development of Statewide Referral Criteria (SRC) is led through a specialty- and patient cohort-specific Clinical Advisory Group. Each Clinical Advisory Group comprises of NSW Health doctors, nurses, midwives, and/or allied health professionals as well as referring health professionals who are appointed to provide clinical advice and expert opinion based on scientific evidence and clinical best practice guidelines. Once the Clinical Advisory Group reaches a consensus on SRC for identified presenting conditions, the SRC is circulated to a range of stakeholders for consultation.

All feedback received from the consultation is considered and, where appropriate, amendments are made to the SRC. The proposed SRC then undergoes an independent, clinical review in preparation for final endorsement from relevant professional groups.

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## Why are Statewide Referral Criteria important?

The availability of Statewide Referral Criteria (SRC) provides referring health professionals with clearer expectations of minimum information required when determining whether to issue a referral to NSW public specialist outpatient services.

The application of SRC improves the quality and appropriateness of referrals to NSW public specialist outpatient services, minimise clinical variation with referral acceptance and triaging practices, and reduce the number of patients who wait unnecessarily on NSW public specialist outpatient waitlists.

## What is the scope of Statewide Referral Criteria?

Statewide Referral Criteria (SRC), where available, is in-scope for NSW Local Health Districts and Specialty Health Networks with existing NSW public specialist outpatient services where new referrals (external and/or internal to NSW Health) are accepted, and presenting conditions with SRC are managed. For example, if Service A is available in NSW Local Health District A, accepts new General Practitioner (GP) referrals and manages Condition A, Service A is to apply SRC for GP referrals where the primary reason is Condition A.

## Are referring health professionals expected to reference the Statewide Referral Criteria upon availability?

Yes. Referring health professionals are expected to reference Statewide Referral Criteria (SRC), where available, when determining to issue referrals to NSW public specialist outpatient services.

By referencing the SRC, referring health professionals will be made aware of thresholds for referral to NSW public specialist outpatient services and the expected clinical urgency category based on clinical need.

## What are the implications for referring health professionals who do not reference the Statewide Referral Criteria?

Referring health professionals who do not reference Statewide Referral Criteria, where available, will be unaware of the minimum information required when determining to issue referrals to NSW public specialist outpatient services.

As a result, patients may be delayed access to care due to NSW public specialist outpatient services seeking additional information from referring health professionals to support with referral screening and triage and/or returning the referral to referring health professionals with advice of alternative care options.

## What are the key changes for referring health professionals with the availability of Statewide Referral Criteria?

| Present state | Desired state | Key changes |
|---|---|---|
| • Issue referrals to NSW public specialist outpatient services based on local referral criteria | • Issue referrals to NSW public specialist outpatient services based on Statewide Referral Criteria (SRC) | • Refer to SRC (where available) when determining to issue referrals to NSW public specialist outpatient services<br>• Supply clinical and non-clinical information in line with SRC to NSW public specialist outpatient services |

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## Are NSW Local Health Districts and Specialty Health Networks expected to apply the Statewide Referral Criteria upon availability?

Yes. In line with NSW Health Service Agreements and the NSW Health Guideline, *Management of Outpatient (Non-Admitted) Services*, NSW Local Health Districts and Specialty Health Networks are expected to apply Statewide Referral Criteria upon availability.

## What are the implications for NSW Local Health Districts and Specialty Health Networks that do not reference the Statewide Referral Criteria, where available?

NSW Local Health Districts and Specialty Health Networks that do not reference Statewide Referral Criteria, where available, may experience inconsistencies in referral acceptance and triage practices. As a result, patients may be delayed access to care due to clinical variation in referral acceptance and triage practices and/or waiting on outpatient waitlists unnecessarily.

## What are the key changes for NSW Local Health Districts and Specialty Health Networks with the availability of Statewide Referral Criteria?

| Present state | Desired state | Key changes |
|---|---|---|
| • Screen referrals based on local referral criteria<br>• Determine triage outcome and clinical urgency category with reference to local referral criteria<br>• Referral screening and triage workflows accommodate local referral criteria | • Screen referrals based on Statewide Referral Criteria (SRC)<br>• Determine triage outcome and clinical urgency category with reference to SRC<br>• Referral screening and triage workflows accommodate SRC | • Refer to SRC, where available, when screening referrals to identify missing information<br>• Request referring health professionals to supply missing information in line with SRC<br>• Refer to SRC, where available, when triaging and clinically prioritising referrals<br>• Redesign referral screening and triage workflows to accommodate SRC |

## When will the Statewide Referral Criteria be made available to referring health professionals, NSW Local Health Districts and Specialty Health Networks?

Information on the publication timeframes for upcoming Statewide Referral Criteria (SRC) is available on the NSW Health SRC webpage. The webapge also provides access to currently available SRC, which can be browsed by specialty or condition.

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## As a referring health professional, how can I access the Statewide Referral Criteria?

Referring health professionals can access the Statewide Referral Criteria (SRC) on the NSW Health SRC webpage. The SRC will also be progressively accessible on NSW HealthPathways pages and NSW electronic referral (eReferral) forms.

## As a clinician working in an NSW public specialist outpatient service, how can I access the Statewide Referral Criteria?

Clinicians working in NSW public specialist outpatient services can access the Statewide Referral Criteria (SRC) on the NSW Health SRC webpage. Each NSW Local Health District and Specialty Health Network will also have local processes and systems in place to support the application of SRC.

## As a referring health professional or clinician working in an NSW public specialist outpatient service, what do I do if the Statewide Referral Criteria is not available for a given specialty or condition?

Where there is no Statewide Referral Criteria available for a given specialty or condition, referring health professionals and clinicians working in NSW public specialist outpatient services are to follow local referral criteria determined by NSW Local Health Districts or Specialty Health Networks and/or visit HealthPathways for more information.

## As a referring health professional or clinician working in an NSW public specialist outpatient service, can I override the Statewide Referral Criteria?

Yes, where appropriate. The Statewide Referral Criteria (SRC) is intended to be used by referring health professionals and clinicians working in NSW public specialist outpatient services as a clinical decision-support tool. As such, referring health professionals and clinicians working in NSW public specialist outpatient services may override the SRC should it be deemed necessary. Issuing and/or accepting referrals that vary from the SRC are to be documented with clinical reasoning.

## As a patient or carer, how can I access the Statewide Referral Criteria?

Patients and carers can access the Statewide Referral Criteria (SRC) on the NSW Health SRC webpage.

## Will all referrals made to an NSW public specialist outpatient service in accordance with the Statewide Referral Criteria result in patients being seen by a doctor?

No. The Statewide Referral Criteria (SRC) supports patients to be managed by the most appropriate member(s) of the multidisciplinary care team in the most appropriate setting based on their presenting condition. This may result in patients being seen by a doctor, nurse, midwife and/or allied health professional.

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## Does the Statewide Referral Criteria apply to referrals where patients are being referred for multiple reasons to a given NSW public specialist outpatient service and there is not a primary condition for the referral?

Statewide Referral Criteria (SRC) may not be applicable to referrals where a patient is being referred for multiple reasons to a given NSW public specialist outpatient service and there is not a primary condition for referral (e.g. complex or rare disease). The decision to apply SRC under these circumstances is to be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

## Are there processes in place to regularly review the Statewide Referral Criteria?

Yes. The relevant Clinical Advisory Group will review the Statewide Referral Criteria (SRC) every five years, at a minimum, to ensure alignment with contemporary evidence and clinical best practice guidelines.

## What is the process to request a change to the Statewide Referral Criteria?

Interested stakeholders can issue Statewide Referral Criteria (SRC) change requests via the NSW Health SRC webpage. All requests submitted will be managed by a representative of the SRC program team at NSW Health. Where SRC change requests are unclear, requesting stakeholders will be invited to meet with an appropriate representative(s) at NSW Health to clarify the request. Where SRC change requests are clear, the request will be circulated to the Clinical Lead(s) of the relevant Clinical Advisory Group and/or Clinical Advisory Group members to review the SRC change request received and determine the need for change(s) to be made.

## How can interested stakeholders obtain further information on the Statewide Referral Criteria?

Interested stakeholders can obtain further information on the Statewide Referral Criteria by visiting the NSW Health SRC webpage or submitting an enquiry to MOH-Outpatients@health.nsw.gov.au.

To view the statewide referral criteria or to learn more about what these changes mean for you, visit the NSW Health website.

health.nsw.gov.au/referrals

## More information

Contact MOH-Outpatients@health.nsw.gov.au

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