

THE AUTHORITY TO MASK

Only custodians who are participating in Alberta Netcare can respond to individuals' requests for masking of their health information. The authorization process outlined in the following document requires that the custodian (or delegate) have the capacity to view the information in Alberta Netcare to make the appropriate decisions related to masking.

DELEGATING THE AUTHORITY TO MASK

Custodians, such as Alberta Health Services, Covenant Health, physicians, and pharmacists, can delegate affiliates who can authorize a masking request within their organizations. Those affiliates must exercise professional judgment and comply with their professional practice standards as outlined in the *Information Exchange Protocol* (IEP) v2.1 and the following guidelines. However, the Custodian retains responsibility for decisions made by affiliates to authorize, refuse and rescind masking within the organization.

SCRIPT FOR DISCUSSING ALBERTA NETCARE & MASKING

Alberta Netcare

Alberta Netcare is a secure record of an Albertan's key health information. It is designed to give authorized health services providers across the province access to a patient's health information such as lab test results, diagnostic imaging reports, medications, allergy information and personal demographic information. Alberta Netcare is a highly secure system that can only be accessed by authorized health services providers who use it to support patient care. Those who access Alberta Netcare are trained in security measures and respect the privacy of health information.

For security purposes, special authorization is required for health services providers to access Alberta Netcare and user access is restricted based on their role and profession. Authorized health services providers are asked for their unique usernames and passwords every time they access Alberta Netcare. The security controls utilized for Alberta Netcare are based on legislative requirements, security industry best-practices and standards of practice. Any access to Alberta Netcare is logged to an access log. These logs are audited monthly. It is an offence to knowingly collect, use, or disclose health information inappropriately and the individual committing the offence could be subject to fines as well as

disciplinary measures within their licensing or professional organizations.

Masking

For reasons of privacy, Albertans have the option of requesting that their health information in Alberta Netcare be "masked". All information about the individual can be masked except for first and last name, date of birth, gender and personal health number. This is called "Masking". If approved, the mask is applied to an individual's health information within Alberta Netcare. Masking makes accessing patient health information a two-step process. The health services provider must select the category (in a drop-down menu) that legitimately reflects the reason for the unmasking before the health information can be viewed. The six categories are:

- Patient Consent
- Direct Patient Care – Clinical Need
- Medical Emergency
- Public Health Follow-up
- For Authorized Release of Patient Information
- As Required by Law

For example, every time a family doctor needs to read a patient's lab result or report, he/she will be required to unmask the patient's health information. Individuals whose health information is masked may experience minor delays in receiving treatment and care as their health information is unmasked.

Unmasking only applies to the health services provider's viewing of the health information for each discrete episode. When the health services provider logs out, or the system is shut down, the mask is reset. The unmasking of the masked health information is logged and subject to auditing (as are all viewings through Alberta Netcare).

Note: Masking in Alberta Netcare does not mask an individual's health information in other electronic clinical information systems used by health services providers in Alberta.

(Rescinding the mask is done via the completion of the AUTHORIZATION to RESCIND MASKING form by the individual or Custodian.)

STEPS	CUSTODIAN RESPONSIBILITIES
1. Print off or get copies of the APPLICATION for MASKING form.	The form: APPLICATION for MASKING can be printed from the Alberta Netcare Login page. It must be filled out, signed and submitted via secure FAX.
2. Individual in your care asks that his/her health information in Netcare be masked.	The requesting individual is directed to a Custodian participating in Alberta Netcare with whom he/she has a current care relationship and who is able to authorize the masking (A participating custodian as defined by the <i>Information Exchange Protocol v2.1</i>). [May include physicians, pharmacists, nurses, etc. as determined by the Custodian organization.]
3. Meet privately, face-to-face. If individual resides far away, complete process by phone. Fill out form on individual's behalf. Note on form if done by phone.	The recommended best practice is to undertake the following inquiries and discussion in a private, face-to-face meeting. However, if the individual and Custodian are geographically distant, the Custodian can engage in the following discussion by phone provided that the identity of the individual can be verified. The Custodian completes the form for the individual and documents on the form that the request was transacted by telephone.
4. Confirm individual's identity, and status as Authorized Representative, if applicable.	The Custodian ensures that the requested masking would apply to the health information: a: of the individual making the request, or b: of an individual for whom the requesting person is able to act as an <u>authorized representative</u> (as per Section 104 of the <i>Health Information Act</i>).
5. View record to see if a mask is present. If not, proceed with next step. If mask in place, tell individual.	The Custodian logs onto Alberta Netcare to view the individual's record, or that of the individual represented, and checks for an existing mask. If not present, proceed with the process. If a mask is present, inform the individual.
6. Discuss benefits and risks of masking with individual (see Script above).	The Custodian engages the requesting individual, or authorized representative, in a discussion of the practical benefits and the potential risks of masking health information. This discussion would likely include some information on Alberta Netcare and its security features, and the occasions when unmasking may occur without the individual's consent (refer to the Script above).
7. Consider individual's wishes and other considerations.	The individual's wishes are an important factor in deciding to proceed with the application of a mask. If, after a discussion of risks and benefits, the individual wants to continue the request, the Custodian must also consider: a: any consequences of masking to public health and safety b: any other compelling reasons to deny the request to mask c: any relevant professional practice guidelines to which the Custodian may be bound.

STEPS	CUSTODIAN RESPONSIBILITIES
8. Have individual complete applicable portions of the form and sign. Fill out 'Custodian' portions of the form and sign.	If there is nothing to prevent the masking, the Custodian and requesting individual may fill out the APPLICATION for MASKING form (found on Alberta Netcare Login page).
REFUSAL: Explain the reason for refusing the masking to the individual and also note it on the back of the form. Place form in individual's file (in paper or electronic format). DO NOT FAX REFUSALS.	REFUSAL: If there are reasons to refuse the masking, the Custodian is responsible for explaining the reasons for the denial to the requesting individual. The individual completes the top portion of the form and the Custodian completes the REFUSAL TO AUTHORIZE portion of the form and documents the reason on the back of the form. The original form is then placed on the individual's file in paper or electronic format (depending on the Custodian's preference). DO NOT FAX any REFUSED application forms.
9. Fax form to 403-776-0431.	Fax the APPLICATION for MASKING form to Alberta Health Services (AHS) Health Information Management at 403-776-0431. (Note: Alberta Health Services applies the technical Masking function on behalf of Alberta Health.)
10. Mask set usually within three business days.	Once faxed, the Masking will be set on Alberta Netcare usually within three (3) business days. Incomplete or illegible forms may necessitate AHS contacting the requesting individual or the Custodian and may delay the setting of the mask.
11. Retain original copy on individual's file (paper or scanned).	The original form is retained by the Custodian and can be kept on the individual's file in paper or electronic format.
	The faxed copy will be kept on file in a locked cabinet at the AHS Health Information Management office. No follow-up notice will be sent to the requesting individual or the Custodian from AHS Health Information Management once the mask has been applied.
REFERENCE: <i>Alberta Netcare Information Exchange Protocol v2.1 Section 5.1: Masking of Information</i>	
ALSO SEE: AUTHORIZATION TO <u>RESCIND</u> MASKING – Form and Guideline	
NEED MORE HELP? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✧ For further information related to the masking process or for assistance filling out the form, call the HIA Help Desk at 780-427-8089 or email: hiahelpdesk@gov.ab.ca ✧ For information about faxing to AHS and the technical application of the mask, call AHS Health Information Management office at 780-735-0650. 	

