

MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY	COMMUNICATIONS COM – 075
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Overview

As a public institution, Eastern Health respects the media’s interest to obtain information about the organization. The media are critical partners in our mission to inform the public and disseminate a variety of public health messages.

Eastern Health also has a moral and legal obligation to protect the privacy and confidentiality of personal information and personal health information of our patients, clients, residents and staff as defined by legislation. Eastern Health is required to balance the public interest, with the right to privacy in accordance with the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (ATIPPA)* and the *Personal Health Information Act (PHIA)*.

POLICY

The organization will make every effort to work with the media by being open, accountable, transparent and responsive with timely and accurate information; however, standards for communication with the media must first and foremost protect the privacy of our patients, clients, residents and staff.

As such, Corporate Communications is the designated single point of entry to the organization for all members of the media. This practice helps to ensure that

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information is obtained through the appropriate authoritative sources, minimizes delays, diminishes possible misunderstandings and maintains confidentiality.

Media requests

- Employees of Eastern Health who receive a media inquiry must direct the media outlet to contact the Media Relations Manager in Corporate Communications at (709) 777-1412. Employees should advise the Media Relations Manager that a call has been received from media, indicate which media outlet has called, and provide the nature of the call, if known.
- Corporate Communications, in consultation with the program or area in question, will determine the most appropriate approach or spokesperson, if required. Corporate Communications will consult with and provide guidance to the spokesperson before arranging an interview.
- Eastern Health will try to provide equal access to all members of the media within this policy. As such, Eastern Health cannot guarantee exclusivity of a story for a media representative.
- All interviews related to Eastern Health should be coordinated through Corporate Communications. The department will use the following to determine the appropriate spokesperson.
 - **Chair of the Board of Trustees and/or President and Chief Executive Officer** – will address larger policy and leadership issues and directions, major announcements and initiatives.
 - **President and CEO** is the official spokesperson for the organization; however he/she may defer to a Vice President (VP) or other appropriate spokesperson to speak to the media. The CEO will speak to high level organizational issues and VPs and/or directors will act as alternates for the CEO as required and/or speak to issues within their portfolios.
 - **Professional Staff** (i.e. medical officers of health, physicians, nurses and other professionals) – may provide information about specific areas of expertise, specific public health information and initiatives and background detail on more technical health matters. Additionally, employees and physicians of Eastern Health who have been designated to speak to media will make every effort possible to accommodate the inquiry in a timely and efficient manner. An employee from Corporate Communications may be present during the interview.

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- **Chief Communications Officer or Media Relations Manager** may respond to basic inquiries about operations, issues, announcements, contact information, etc., or act as a conduit for written statements from subject matter experts.
 - Designated spokespersons for Eastern Health shall clearly communicate their Eastern Health affiliation and title and should ask media to identify them as such in their reporting.
 - Any employee or member of the medical staff who is not a designated spokesperson shall not present themselves as a representative for Eastern Health. When speaking with media outside of their role with Eastern Health (in a private capacity or on behalf of another organization), employees are required to inform members of the media that they should not be referenced by their Eastern Health title and their comments are not on behalf of the organization. Efforts should also be made to not reference their specific work with Eastern Health as they are not speaking on behalf of the organization.
 - Eastern Health and its designated spokespersons **do not** speak publicly about:
 1. specific patient cases, including confirmation of an individual's death,
 2. issues that are before the courts,
 3. internal human resource issues that involve a specific employee(s) of the organization, and
 4. information that is not in compliance with the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (ATIPPA)* and the *Personal Health Information Act (PHIA)*.
 - Serious breaches of this policy will be assessed and addressed on a case-by-case basis by appropriate leadership.

Release of patient, client or resident information

- Eastern Health is responsible for protecting the privacy and confidentiality of its patients, clients, residents and staff and adheres to the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (ATIPPA)* and the *Personal Health Information Act (PHIA)*. Neither Corporate Communications nor any other employee or agent will release to media any specific information about a patient, client or resident.
- On occasion, with consent, Eastern Health may release a *condition code* for acute care patients to media when provided the name of the individual in care. The clinical program area would need to receive consent from the patient and/or family. It should be noted that condition codes are temporary and subject to change.

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Emergency and crisis situations

- During an emergency or crisis situation, the media will require timely and accurate information. Eastern Health will make every effort to react quickly by providing up-to-date information to local, provincial and national media outlets, as required.
- The President and CEO or appointed designate is the primary spokesperson for the organization during an emergency or crisis situation. All media requests for a corporate spokesperson will be directed to Corporate Communications. Only those designated will act as media spokespersons for the organization to ensure main messages are clear and aligned throughout the region.
- Media briefing sites may be established. A crisis communication plan will be followed, if necessary.

Media visits

- All visits by news media to an Eastern Health facility must be authorized by Corporate Communications.

Photography and filming requests

- To protect the privacy of patients, Corporate Communications will facilitate authorization of all photographs and filming requests, medical or non-medical, to be released to the media or other agencies. A consent form (Consent for Photographs, Films, and Sound Recordings, CH-0254), signed by the patient, guardian of patient or substitute decision maker, is required for all photography and filming requests involving patients and staff in Eastern Health facilities.

Access to Information Requests

- With the exception of *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy* (ATIPP) requests, all media requests and inquiries, news releases, media advisories, public service announcements or social media promotion concerning any Eastern Health department, program or service must be coordinated by Corporate Communications.
- At Eastern Health, members of the public and media may request information in the custody or control of Eastern Health through the means of an *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy* (ATIPP) request. The request for information must be accompanied by a completed ATIPP form accessible at www.easternhealth.ca. Please see [Access to Information Requests \(ATIPP Requests\)](#).

Scope

Applies to all employees, volunteers, students and agents of Eastern Health.

Purpose

- To protect the right to private and confidential care for all patients, clients and residents;
- To protect the right to privacy and confidentiality for all Eastern Health employees, students on work terms, and agents (physician, volunteer, contractor);
- To ensure that the organization meets the media's need for and right to information in a consistent and timely manner;
- To assist the organization in building a strong, trustworthy and authoritative public reputation; and
- To provide direction for employees when requests from media are received.

Procedure

Media requests

- All media inquiries received by employees must be directed to the Media Relations Manager by telephone at (709) 777-1412 between 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. This includes requests for interviews with patients, clients, physicians or employees and agents (including volunteers and contractors). The employee should not comment to media or commit to an interview. Facilitation of these requests will be the decision of Corporate Communications in consultation with the appropriate leadership, physicians or other staff or caregivers as appropriate.
- In emergency or crisis situations outside of regular business hours, Corporate Communications staff will respond to media requests on a priority basis. Media requests during evenings, weekends and holidays involving matters deemed routine or operational by Corporate Communications will be deferred until the next business day.
- If a patient, client or resident gives authorization for an interview, the proper consent form (Consent for Photographs, Films, and Sound Recordings, CH-0254) must be signed and placed in his/her health record. All Eastern Health employees must protect the rights and privacy of patients, clients, employees, students on work terms and agents of Eastern Health. A representative of the organization must be present to escort the media to and from the arranged interview setting.

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- Employees who would like to use the media to promote an Eastern Health event, achievement, program, etc. should coordinate through Corporate Communications.

Release of patient, client or resident information

- Corporate Communications, as well as other employees, students on work terms, or agents of Eastern Health must not release any personal health information about a patient, client or resident to the media.
- Due to the *Personal Health Information Act* (PHIA), as the custodians of their information, Eastern Health is unable to publicly discuss any specifics regarding any individual patient's case.
- Eastern Health will not acknowledge a patient's care circumstances. On occasion, with consent, Eastern Health may release a *condition code* for acute care patients to the media when provided the name of the individual in care. The condition codes are:
 - **Good:** Vital signs such as pulse, temperature and blood pressure are stable and within normal limits. Patient is conscious and comfortable. Outlook for recovery is good or excellent.
 - **Fair:** Vital signs are stable and within normal limits. Patient is conscious but is uncomfortable or may have minor complications. Favorable outlook.
 - **Serious:** Acutely ill with questionable outlook. Vital signs are unstable or not within normal limits. A chance for improved outlook.
 - **Critical:** Questionable outlook. Vital signs are unstable or not within normal limits. There are major complications and death may be imminent.
 - **Stable:** The term stable may be used in conjunction with the above definitions if the patient's vital signs are considered to be stable. The term stable is not to be used alone as a condition (i.e. serious but stable condition).
 - **Treated and released:** Patient examined, treated and discharged

Emergency or crisis situations

- The President and CEO or appointed designate is the primary spokesperson for the organization during an emergency or crisis situation. Only those designated will act as media spokespersons for the organization. Establishing a consistent, identifiable, credible Eastern Health spokesperson will contribute to reducing public anxiety and panic.

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- During an emergency or crisis situation, the primary or key spokesperson requirements and roles will be reviewed and evaluated. Corporate Communications will coordinate media requests, verify appointed spokespersons, establish and build credibility for spokespersons, and provide crisis communications and media training for relevant employees as needed.
 - Corporate Communications will coordinate essential information with other agencies and organizations involved with the disaster team.
 - Media briefing sites may be established and identified in each region as part of Eastern Health's *All Hazards Management Plan*, accessible via Eastern Health's Health Emergency Management (HEM) Program at hem@easternhealth.ca. In some cases, access to facilities may be restricted or denied depending on the crisis situation.

Site visits

- Site visits by media (including access to patient rooms, parking garages, clinics, office spaces, etc.) must be authorized by Corporate Communications by calling (709) 777-1412. A representative of the organization will escort all journalists, photographers, videographers or any other news media personnel acting in an official capacity while they are at an Eastern Health facility. An organizational representative will also be present during all interviews and/or filming or photography sessions.
- Media representatives are expected to clearly identify themselves to Eastern Health employees when they are acting in an official, professional capacity as a member of the media, whether in person, on the telephone or through electronic communications. If a member(s) of the media are observed unaccompanied in any Eastern Health facility, it is appropriate for Eastern Health staff or security personnel to ask the reporter/photographer to confirm what program or department authorized the visit. If the visit has not been authorized, media will be directed to contact the Media Relations Manager and may be asked to leave the facility.
- For the safety and privacy of patients, media interviews will not be permitted in critical care areas (for example, emergency departments, operating rooms and intensive care units). Eastern Health employees or agents who become aware that patients, clients, residents or relatives wish to talk to the media must notify the Media Relations Manager immediately at (709) 777-1412 to make the necessary arrangements and to determine an appropriate location for a media interview.

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- If a patient, client or resident gives authorization for an interview, the proper consent form (Consent for Photographs, Films, and Sound Recordings, CH-0254) must be signed and placed in their health record. All Eastern Health staff must protect the rights and privacy of patients, clients, staff, physicians and volunteers.
 - Members of the media are asked to abide by federal regulations around helipads/heliports. Rotor downwash from a helicopter can cause a safety hazard to people and equipment on the ground in the immediate vicinity of a helicopter. Transport Canada requires that the area be kept clear of all obstacles except for those required for air navigation purposes. For these safety reasons, members of the media are not permitted within fenced or designated areas near helipads. In the event that media wish to film or photograph the arrival of a helicopter, they are required to stay outside of the fenced or designated area and respect patient privacy by not taking photos or video which would identify an individual.

Photography and film requests

- Upon approval, and once appropriate consent forms have been signed, news media may photograph and/or film in Eastern Health facilities. Any "hidden" device to audiotape, videotape, video-image and/or photograph inside an Eastern Health facility is not permitted. Devices would include digital cameras and cell phones with photo and video capabilities. A representative of the organization must be present with media for all photography and videography to ensure this policy is respected, including considerations around patient privacy and escort in and out of the facilities.
- Organizational representatives must make an effort to ensure that patients, residents, clients, visitors and staff not be photographed or videotaped in Eastern Health facilities in such a way as to be recognized unless the patient, parent, client, resident, visitor, staff or other responsible party has signed a consent form (CH-0254).
- Media may film or photograph in public areas outside of Eastern Health facilities, including the grounds/parking lots/sidewalks provided they respect the Privacy Act and there are no safety concerns. Interviews in these areas are permitted only with consent from the individual being interviewed. Eastern Health requests that media provide a courtesy notification to the Media Relations Manager that they will be in the area and the purpose for such visit, and for privacy reasons, not film or photograph at close range of the entrances of Eastern Health facilities.

Guideline

Corporate Communications has the responsibility and authority to manage communications with the media.

Linkages

- [Consent for Photographs, Films, and Sound Recordings](#) (CH-0254)
- [Privacy and Confidentiality Policy \(ADM-030\)](#)
- [Release/disclosure of personal health information to a third party policy](#) (RM-CR(I)-350)
- [Access to Information Requests \(ATIPP Requests\)](#) (ACP-075)
- *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*
- *Personal Health Information Act*
- [Crisis Communications Plan](#)

Key Words

Media, confidentiality, privacy, personal information, personal health information, filming, photography, media relations, news, reporter, interviews

Definitions & Acronyms

Agent(s)	A person, other than an employee, authorized by Eastern Health to act on its behalf. This term includes physicians, volunteers, pastoral care workers as well as staff of contractors and other persons working within Eastern Health facilities or affiliated with Eastern Health.
Condition Code	A one-word definition of the current health state of an individual, as determined by an appropriate designate for a care team. A condition code is only released with the consent of the patient or family spokesperson.
News Release	An official written or recorded communication directed at members of the news media for the purposes of announcing something of news value.
Media Spokesperson	A designated or authorized individual who speaks on behalf of the organization.
Confidentiality	The duty to protect, respect and maintain the privacy of personal health and business information, the obligation to refrain from disclosing personal health

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	information outside the “circle of care” or business information to others not involved with the use of the information in the normal course of their authorized work.
Privacy of information	The right of an individual within limits to determine when, how and to what extent personal information is collected, used and disclosed about him/herself.
Communications Plan	A written document, developed in consultation with Corporate Communications and an Eastern Health Program, which outlines step by step processes to ensure that the intended message is received, understood, and acted upon by the recipient. It involves determining the objectives, choosing the audience(s), and selecting appropriate channel(s) to reach them.
Personal Information	<p>Section 2(1) of the <i>Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act</i> (2000, c. 5) (PIPEDA) states that “personal information” means “information about an identifiable individual, but does not include the name, title or business address or telephone number of an employee of an organization.”</p> <p>The <i>Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act 2015</i> (ATIPPA) sets out the rules for the collection, use and disclosure of personal information.</p>
Personal Health Information	<p>Identifying information in oral or recorded form about an individual that relates to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the physical or mental health of the individual, including information respecting the individual’s health care status and history and the health history of the individual’s family; b. the provision of health care to the individual, including information respecting the person providing the health care; c. the donation by an individual of a body part or bodily substance, including information derived from the testing or examination of a body part or bodily substance; d. registration information; e. payments or eligibility for a health care program or service in respect of the individual, including eligibility for coverage under an insurance or payment arrangement with respect to health care; f. an individual’s entitlement to benefits under or participation in a health care program or service;

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	<p>g. information about the individual that is collected in the course of, and is incidental to, the provision of a health care program or service or payment for a health care program or service;</p> <p>h. a drug as defined in the Pharmacy Act, a health care aid, device, product, equipment or other item provided to an individual under a prescription or other authorization issued by a health care professional; or the identity of a person's representative or guardian.</p> <p><i>Source – Personal Health Information Act</i></p>
<p>Access to Information requests</p>	<p>With limited exceptions, the <i>Access to Information and Protection of Privacy (ATIPP) Act</i> gives individuals a right of access to records held by public bodies.</p>