
ALTERNATE LEVEL OF CARE PATIENTS

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Patients in an acute hospital bed are there because they need acute care services. This means they need short-term, intensive medical treatment for an illness, injury or recovery from surgery.

Once patients complete this “acute care” phase of treatment, they often require an alternate level of care (ALC). ALC patients are individuals in a hospital bed who would be better cared for in an alternate setting.

What is an alternate level of care?

When patients need an alternate level of care, it means they may require:

- a long-term care home bed
- complex continuing care bed
- a convalescent care bed
- a rehabilitation care bed
- home care
- palliative care

More than 18 per cent of patients who are currently in a hospital bed in Ontario are in need of an alternate level of care.

How do ALC patients contribute to backlogs in the emergency room?

New patients come into hospitals through the ER or through scheduled appointments for surgery. Patients receive acute care services and then go home or await an alternate level of care.

When patients remain in an acute hospital bed because the alternate level of care they need is unavailable. This means they are not receiving care in the appropriate setting. They are also in a bed that could be better used for a patient who needs acute hospital care. This creates a domino effect in hospitals when there are no beds available.

Patients who arrive in the emergency room and need to be admitted to an acute care bed are then stuck in an ER bed awaiting transfer to a regular hospital bed.

When all the ER beds are occupied, physicians do not have beds to examine or treat patients. This creates long wait times in the ER which are very stressful for both patients and staff.