



## Protecting Patient Privacy through Masking Information in Alberta Netcare

The Health Information Act (HIA) establishes rules to protect the privacy of Albertans' health information, and regulate how health information can be collected, used and disclosed. As authorized custodians (and affiliates), Alberta Netcare users must consider their patients' wishes for limiting the disclosure of their health information through Alberta Netcare. The method that Alberta Netcare uses to communicate this expressed wish is called *masking*.

### How Does Masking Work?

When a mask is in place, the individual's health information is not automatically visible. Only the demographic information such as first and last name, date of birth, gender and personal health number will display. This enables the health care professional to confirm that they are viewing the correct patient record.

### Unmasking the Record

The presence of a mask does not remove the health information from the system, but rather makes viewing it a two-step process. The user must select the reason for the *unmasking* before the record can be viewed. The six reasons are: Patient Consent, Direct Patient Care/Clinical Need, Medical Emergency, Public Health Follow-up, For Authorized Release of Patient Information, and As Required by Law. The unmasking of health information is logged and subject to auditing. Albertans can request a copy of the audit logs for their Alberta Netcare record at any time.

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

## Requesting a Mask

Albertans who wish to request a mask will contact one of their health care providers (ideally one with whom they already have a current care relationship). The health care provider must discuss what masking means with the patient, and possible delays to patient care that may result from the presence of a mask. Once the application form is complete, the health care provider submits the application form on the individual's behalf.

**Note:** There may be circumstances where a custodian is unable to authorize masking for an individual, for example, if masking that information could pose a threat to the individual or to public health and safety.

A full set of guidelines and step-by-step instructions for completing the form are available on the Alberta Netcare Portal Login Page, or the Alberta Netcare Learning Centre:  
[www.albertanetcare.ca/LearningCentre/documents/Masking-Final\\_Applyform.pdf](http://www.albertanetcare.ca/LearningCentre/documents/Masking-Final_Applyform.pdf)

## Rescinding a Mask

An individual may request that a mask be rescinded the same way they requested the mask, by contacting a health care provider that is participating in Alberta Netcare. A request to rescind a mask may also be initiated by a health care provider if he or she becomes aware of new circumstances that affect an individual's eligibility for masking. In this case, the health care provider must attempt to inform the individual of their decision prior to removal of the mask.

If you have questions about masking please contact the Health Information Act Help Desk by phone: 780-427-8089 (toll free 310-0000) or by email: [hiahelpdesk@gov.ab.ca](mailto:hiahelpdesk@gov.ab.ca)