

CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool

Implementation Guide



Update January 2026

This guide has been developed to support implementation of the CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool. Topics covered include:

- Overview of the CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool
- Development of the Tool
- Utilization of the Tool
- Implementation considerations
- Post implementation
- Additional resources
- Acknowledgements

Overview

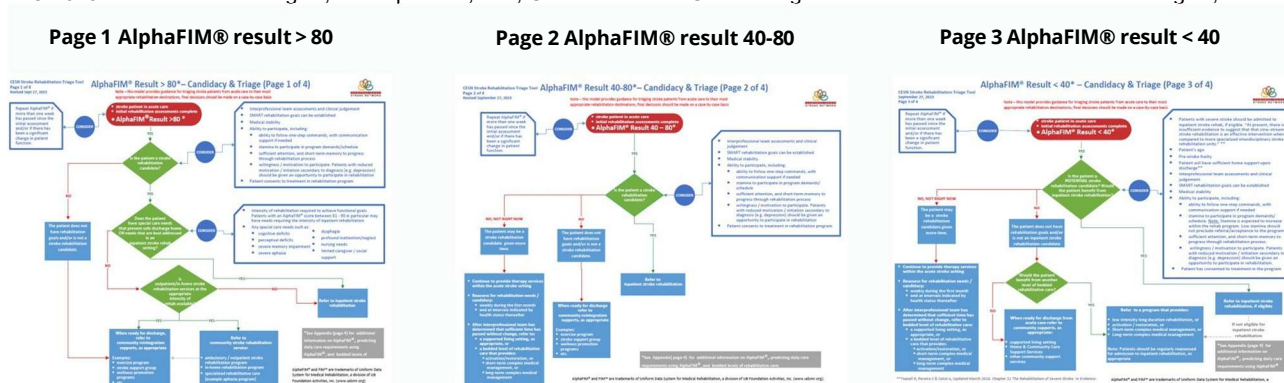
What is the CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool?

The Tool is a clinical resource that supports a standardized, best practice aligned approach to decision making for acute stroke patients regarding:

- candidacy for stroke rehabilitation (does the patient need rehabilitation/ are they appropriate for rehabilitation)
- triage for rehabilitation (which rehabilitation setting is the most appropriate)

The Tool incorporates clinical assessment information, including the AlphaFIM[®], patient considerations (e.g., family support, rehabilitation goals, ability to participate) and interprofessional team input to identify the most appropriate post-acute rehabilitation destination for the patient.

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How does the Tool support best practice?

The CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool supports best practice by:

- outlining a standardized, consistent approach to decision making for stroke rehabilitation setting as recommended by Canadian Stroke Best Practice Recommendations which state:
 - “once a patient with stroke has undergone assessments, a standardized approach is recommended to determine the appropriate setting for rehabilitation (inpatient, outpatient, community, and/or home-based settings).” [CSBPR Rehabilitation Recovery and Community Participation Following Stroke Part One: Stroke Rehabilitation Planning for Optimal Care Delivery. 7th Edition, 2025, 1.vi.](#)
- considering the results of standardized valid rehabilitation assessments such as AlphaFIM®* and other clinical assessments. Canadian Stroke Best Practice Recommendations state:
 - “assessments of impairment, functional activity limitations, role participation restrictions and environmental factors should be conducted using standardized valid assessment tools” [CSBPR Rehabilitation Recovery and Community Participation Following Stroke Part One: Stroke Rehabilitation Planning for Optimal Care Delivery. 7th Edition, 2025, 1.vi.](#)
 - incorporating stroke rehabilitation candidacy criteria as outlined in Canadian Stroke Best Practice Recommendations ([CSBPR Rehabilitation Recovery and Community Participation Following Stroke Part One: Stroke Rehabilitation Planning for Optimal Care Delivery. 7th Edition 2025 Box: 1 Eligibility Criteria for Stroke Rehabilitation](#))

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What are the benefits of using the Tool?

The expected benefit of this Tool is the appropriate identification of:

- stroke rehabilitation candidates and
- stroke rehabilitation destination

An additional expected benefit is to facilitate interprofessional collaboration and communication.

The CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool supports Canadian Stroke Best Practice Recommendations and Accreditation Canada Stroke Distinction Standards regarding:

- assessment of rehabilitation needs
- referral to rehabilitation
- discharge planning

How was the Tool developed?

A regional rehabilitation triage tool was first introduced in 2014. Since then, there have been several iterations of the tool, leveraging work completed in other Ontario Stroke Networks.

The CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool has been adapted from work completed by:

- Southwestern Ontario Stroke Network
- Toronto Stroke Networks Stroke Triage Tool
- Champlain Regional Stroke Rehabilitation System patient flow algorithm
- Hamilton Heath System Integrated Model of Stroke Recovery.

The most recent version (September 2023) builds upon previous regional versions and incorporates feedback from:

- a working group of front-line clinicians
- a pilot of the tool conducted at 5 organizations within the CESN.


What was the feedback from the pilot?

Pilot sites used the Tool with a minimum of 10 acute stroke patients and then provided feedback on the usability of the Tool via a survey.

Most survey respondents responded that the Tool:

- was easy to use
- assisted with clinical decision making
- had a logical flow.

Pilot participants also provided feedback about the **usability**, **clinical decision making** and **design** aspects of the Tool.

Usability	Clinical Decision Making	Design
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Helpful for clinicians new to stroke.• Can be used to orient new team members to decision making for stroke rehabilitation.• Supports team conversations/decisions that occur already about rehabilitation candidacy and post-acute rehabilitation setting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aligns with clinicians' clinical reasoning and thought processes.• Helpful with complex cases, when the most appropriate rehabilitation destination isn't clear to the team.• Helps to "double check" decisions by the team. It's a good reference tool.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make the tool easier to read, simpler to view and follow. <p>Outcome: Final version revised from a 2-page pilot version to 4 pages to address feedback.</p> 

Utilization of the Tool

How and when is the tool used?

The CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Tool is used in acute care:

- with stroke patients
- by the interprofessional team
- to support decision making about rehabilitation candidacy and identification of the most appropriate post-acute rehabilitation setting.

The Tool can be used in team huddles, rounds or via other associated organizational practices. It can also be used as an education resource to support orientation of team members who are new to stroke care.

Implementation Considerations

Supporting uptake of the CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool

To support uptake and consistent use of the CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool it is important to:

- foster a high perceived value for this Tool among team members. Ensure team members understand:
 - its purpose
 - how clinician input informed its development
 - its value
- minimize any perceived increase in workload. Organizations are encouraged to develop clear processes that support use of Tool. Incorporate the Tool into existing:
 - unit practices such as team huddles or rounds
 - processes and workflows such as care pathways/care plans
- foster an expectation that the Tool is utilized with all acute stroke patients.
 - create a mechanism for documenting the use of the Tool and the associated outcome regarding appropriate rehabilitation destination, in the patient record.
 - establish a process for monitoring use of the Tool.
 - identify a champion who can encourage and reinforce the use of the Tool among the interprofessional team
 - include education on the Tool into on-boarding of new staff.

Key messages to support implementation

Focus	Key message
Value of the CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool	<p>The pilot feedback highlighted the value of the Tool:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • as an education resource - supporting orientation of new staff to stroke rehabilitation triage • in facilitating team collaboration and decision making as a reference guide - supporting clinical reasoning and thought processes • in more complex cases where the most appropriate rehabilitation destination isn't immediately apparent to the team • in supporting existing processes (i.e., team conversations and decision making) regarding rehabilitation destination. <p>Aligns with Canadian Stroke Best Practice Recommendations</p> <p>Supports Accreditation Canada Stroke Distinction Standards</p>
Addressing perceived increase in workload	<p>Feedback from Clinicians on the Tool during the Pilot Phase:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it facilitates activities (i.e., conversations, team discussions, decisions) that are already part of the regular workflow. <p>Comments received specific to workload:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It's nothing new - nothing that they (the team) aren't already doing," according to one participant • Another participant described it as an "adjunct to care" that they (the team) are providing anyway.
Expectation related to use of Tool	<p>It is recommended that the CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool is used with all acute stroke patients as it supports a standardized, best practice aligned approach to decision making regarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidacy for stroke rehabilitation • Triage for rehabilitation <p>Organizations are encouraged to develop key messages to support associated processes and documentation expectations related to use of the Tool.</p>

Looking for More Copies of the Tool?

All organizations in the CESN providing acute inpatient care to stroke patients received copies of the Triage Tool in 2 formats.

- paper copy which can be added to clinician binders or clipboards
- laminated which can be posted in charting areas, near workstations, meeting rooms, etc.

The CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool and associated resources are available on the CESN website www.cesnstroke.ca (see - clinical resources tab).

There may be a small inventory of hardcopies remaining from the initial dissemination to sites. Please send requests for additional copies and any other inquiries to cesn@rvh.on.ca

Additional Resources

Locating additional implementation resources

More resources to assist with using and implementing the Tool can be found on www.cesnstroke.ca under the clinical resources tab.

- FAQ (a handout version of the Frequently Asked Questions listed below)
- Informational flyer (one page overview to support staff education)
- Key messages (a handout version of the key messages noted above)
- Additional resources will be posted as they are developed.

The CESN Stroke Regional Rehabilitation Coordinator is available to support organizational implementation efforts. Please reach out with requests to cesn@rvh.on.ca

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool?

CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool is a clinical resource that supports a standardized, best practice aligned approach to decision making for acute stroke patients regarding:

- candidacy for stroke rehabilitation (does the patient need rehabilitation/ are they appropriate for rehabilitation)
- triage for rehabilitation (which rehabilitation setting is the most appropriate).

(continued)

What is the CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool (continued)?

The Tool incorporates clinical assessment information, including AlphaFIM®* assessment results, patient considerations (e.g., family support, rehabilitation goals, ability to participate) and interprofessional team input to identify the most appropriate post-acute rehabilitation destination for the patient.

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How does the CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool support best practice?

The CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool supports best practice by:

- outlining a standardized, consistent approach to decision making for stroke rehabilitation setting as recommended by Canadian Stroke Best Practice Recommendations which state:
 - “once a patient with stroke has undergone assessments, a standardized approach is recommended to determine the appropriate setting for rehabilitation (inpatient, outpatient, community, and/or home-based settings).” [CSBPR Rehabilitation, Recovery and Community Participation Following Stroke, Part One: Stroke Rehabilitation Planning for Optimal Care Delivery, 7th edition, 2025, 1.vi.](#)
- considering the results of standardized valid rehabilitation assessments such as AlphaFIM®* and other clinical assessments. Canadian Stroke Best Practice Recommendations state:
 - “assessments of impairment, functional activity limitations, role participation restrictions and environmental factors should be conducted using standardized valid assessment tools” [CSBPR Rehabilitation, Recovery and Community Participation Following Stroke, Part One: Stroke Rehabilitation Planning for Optimal Care Delivery, 7th edition, 2025, 1.vi.](#)
- incorporating stroke rehabilitation candidacy criteria as outlined in Canadian Stroke Best Practice Recommendations [CSBPR Rehabilitation, Recovery and Community Participation Following Stroke, Part One: Stroke Rehabilitation Planning for Optimal Care Delivery, 7th Edition, 2025. Box one: Eligibility Criteria for Stroke Rehabilitation](#)

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What are the benefits of using the CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool?

The expected benefits of using this tool include:

- facilitating objective, standardized, and consistent decision-making for post-acute rehabilitation
- identification of stroke rehabilitation candidates
- promoting interprofessional communication and collaboration
- identification of the most appropriate destination for rehabilitation.

How was the CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool developed?

A regional rehabilitation triage tool was first introduced in 2014. Since then, there have been several iterations of the tool, which have leveraged work completed in other Ontario Stroke Networks.

The CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool has been adapted from:

- work completed by Southwestern Ontario Stroke Network
- Toronto Stroke Networks Stroke Triage Tool
- Champlain Regional Stroke Rehabilitation System patient flow algorithm
- Hamilton Heath System Integrated Model of Stroke Recovery.

The most recent version (September 2023) builds upon previous regional versions and incorporates feedback:

- from a working group of front-line clinicians
- received via a pilot of the Tool at 5 organizations within the CESN

There are several considerations noted in the Tool, what is the source of these considerations?

The Tool incorporates the Canadian Stroke Best Practice Recommendations' criteria for determining stroke rehabilitation eligibility. [CSBPR Rehabilitation, Recovery and Community Participation Following Stroke, Part One: Stroke Rehabilitation Planning for Optimal Care Delivery, 7th Edition, 2025. Box one: Eligibility Criteria for Stroke Rehabilitation.](#)

Why does the Tool incorporate AlphaFIM®* assessment results?

The AlphaFIM®* assessment provides an overall level of functional impairment post stroke. It is the tool used provincially for the purposes of triaging stroke rehabilitation patients.

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Why should I use this Tool if we're already utilizing AlphaFIM®*?

AlphaFIM®* score helps determine where a patient would be best served after acute treatment is complete.

However, it is only one of several factors that should be considered when determining the most appropriate rehabilitation destination for a stroke patient - clinical judgement, and rehabilitation assessment results should also inform this decision.

The CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool incorporates these factors (clinical assessment information, AlphaFIM®* results, clinical judgement and additional patient considerations (e.g., family support, rehabilitation goals, ability to participate), to facilitate objective, standardized, consistent decision-making for the most appropriate post-acute rehabilitation destination for the patient.

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As a clinician, how does this Tool make my job easier? What's its value?

Clinicians who participated in the pilot provided this feedback regarding its value:

- as an education resource - supporting orientation of new staff to stroke rehabilitation triage
- in facilitating team collaboration and decision making
- as a reference guide - supporting clinical reasoning and thought processes
- in more complex cases where the most appropriate rehabilitation destination isn't immediately apparent to the team
- in supporting existing processes (i.e., team conversations and decision making) regarding the rehabilitation destination.

From a workload standpoint, the following feedback was received.

- The Tool facilitates activities (i.e., conversations, team discussions, decisions) that are already part of the regular workflow.
- "It's nothing new - nothing that they (the team) aren't already doing," according to one participant.
- Another participant described it as an "adjunct to care" that they (the team) are providing anyway.

Have Feedback?

If you have suggestions for supporting resources or if you have feedback to share, please contact cesn@rvh.on.ca

Acknowledgements

Thank you to:

- the numerous front-line clinicians and leaders, and pilot participants from across the Central East Stroke Network for their input, feedback and support throughout the development process. Without your active involvement, development of the CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool would not have been possible.
- colleagues in the Ontario Stroke Networks for sharing their rehabilitation triage tools and resources. These resources served as the basis for developing the CESN Stroke Rehabilitation Triage Tool.

*thank
you*