

Edmonton Mental Health Court (EMHC) Info and Tip Sheet

What is the Edmonton Mental Health Court?

The Edmonton Mental Health Court (EMHC) is a specialty criminal docket courtroom designed to address matters in which the client has mental health issues/diagnoses that are believed to have contributed in some way to their conflict with the law. The EMHC operates on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays out of Courtroom #357 in Edmonton's Provincial Court. The court handles fitness hearings, bail hearings, summary dispositions and bail/probation check-ins but does not deal with trial matters. In addition to the designated Judges and Duty Counsel, this courtroom includes the involvement of a team of Alberta Health Services (AHS) liaisons (including psychiatric nurses and a forensic psychiatrist) that can aid your client's case. It is important to note that EMHC is a collaborative courtroom where all parties work together so that matters are dealt with in a holistic fashion. For more information about the EMHC see: <https://albertacourts.ca/pc/areas-of-law/criminal/mental-health-court>

How does the EMHC work?

This courtroom works as follows: If you or your client believes that they have a mental health issue/diagnosis, and you believe it may have contributed to their offences or could be of importance in fully assessing your client's release or culpability, then you should request, before a Judge, that your client's matter(s) be referred to **Courtroom 357** (the EMHC) and provide the court with some background in relation to their mental health diagnoses or issues. At your client's first appearance in the EMHC, the court will likely ask for clarification regarding **why your client's matters are in courtroom 357**.

To help answer this question, the EMHC has a consent form, which, when filled out and provided to AHS, allows for your client's health and personal information to be shared with you. This consent form is available in Courtroom 357, at the Edmonton Remand Center, Fort Saskatchewan Remand Center, Alberta Hospital Edmonton, on the [Alberta Courts website](https://albertacourts.ca), or by emailing EMHC@ahs.ca. Information from your client's medical record can be received by either: A) emailing EMHC@ahs.ca, or B) asking one of the AHS liaisons that appears in the court. On Wednesdays, a psychiatric nurse will be present in the morning and a forensic psychiatrist attends in the afternoon. Please note that the information that the AHS liaison shares with you via email is shared only with you, the client's defense counsel. As such, it is up to your discretion whether you share your client's information with the Crown and court if you believe it will benefit your client's case. However, information requested from the AHS liaisons in court on a Wednesday will be heard by both the Crown and the Judge. Given that this is a collaborative court, this sharing of information should not deter you from requesting information from the AHS liaisons during court.

Alternatively, if no information can be found by the AHS liaisons, but you and/or your client are under the impression that there should be a history of mental health issue(s), the matter(s) may stay in this courtroom while you make efforts to contact your client's General Practitioner, or any psychologist/psychiatrist they may have seen in the past.

What about fitness assessments?

If you have concerns about your client's fitness to stand trial or your ability to receive instructions and wish for a fitness assessment to be conducted, you can adjourn your matter from another courtroom to the EMHC for this purpose, as this courtroom is the most apt at dealing with fitness concerns. Fitness assessments can be ordered and will be completed by one of the forensic psychiatrists at the Edmonton Remand Center, or by a psychiatrist at Alberta Hospital Edmonton.

The information that follows are some tips/suggestions to help you navigate defending your client in the EMHC:

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1) Are you wanting to move your client into the EMHC?

- If so, please verify whether or not the client meets the criteria required to be in the EMHC (i.e. they have a mental health issue/diagnosis, and you believe it may have contributed to their offences or could be of importance in fully assessing your client's release or culpability).
- If the case is already in the EMHC (e.g. it went there for a fitness assessment that has now been completed), but it does not fit EMHC criteria, please adjourn the case to the appropriate courtroom.

2) Do you want to obtain your client's health or personal records?

- If so, please review the EMHC consent form with your client and have them sign it. It is important to review the form on your own prior to explaining it to your client. This consent form is available at the Edmonton Remand Center, Fort Saskatchewan Remand Center, Alberta Hospital Edmonton, in Courtroom 357, on the [Alberta Courts website](#), or by emailing EMHC@ahs.ca.
- Please note that access to this information is a key feature of this value-added courtroom and, as such, it is expected that this **consent form be completed in order confirm that the matters meet the criteria and are suitable to remain in EMHC**.
- Please ensure that the signed consent form is sent to EMHC@ahs.ca. **Consent forms not sent to EMHC@ahs.ca will not be acknowledged as completed.**
- It is possible that your client may have signed the consent form at a prior date. To check whether AHS has received your client's consent form, you can ask the AHS liaisons in court or by e-mail at EMHC@ahs.ca.
- Once AHS has received the consent form, you can request that the AHS liaisons (at EMHC@ahs.ca) provide your client's relevant medical history. **Emails not sent to EMHC@ahs.ca will not receive a response.** The liaisons may not respond immediately, so try to give a reasonable time to respond and **allow for 3 business days prior to sending a follow-up email.**
- Tips for defence counsel regarding consent forms:
 - You can ask Correctional officers to assist your client in signing the form during their CCTV appearance in court
 - Make efforts to have the consent form signed prior to your client's court appearance and reach out to the AHS liaisons to get your client's relevant medical information prior to appearing in court, therefore reducing the number of adjournments
 - When emailing EMHC@ahs.ca, be specific about what health/personal information you want, when possible. For example, if you want to verify whether what your client has told you is accurate as well as get any additional information (diagnoses, community connections, etc.) that might be beneficial, please write just that. Or, if you are specifically only wanting to know if they have been attending their appointments, please just ask that.
- Please be aware that it is possible that the AHS Liaisons may not have any information to provide you or perhaps just not what you were looking for. However, also remember that the AHS liaisons are not the only potential source of information. It is possible that your client has medical information in another province that you can try to obtain. Additionally, if your client has their own health care professionals/supports (e.g., a social worker, psychologist, or physician) you can obtain information from them by having them write a letter. Alternatively, you can have your client be assessed if there are unaddressed concerns

3) Is there information in your client's medical history that may benefit their case?

- If so, you should consider sharing any mental health information that you believe will be beneficial to your client's case with the Crown Prosecutor. It is **entirely up to your discretion** to do so, since any information provided to you about your client's personal and medical history is only shared with you. However, the value-added aspect of this court mostly comes from the collaborative process of information-sharing between AHS, defense counsel, and the Crown. Without access to this information, the Crown may take the position that your client is not suited for this court or may make a less appropriate resolution offer.

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4) Have you lost contact with your client?

- If so, you can contact both Cyndi Brand (the Justice Navigator) at cbrand@legalaid.ab.ca or (780) 935-6019 and the AHS liaisons at EMHC@ahs.ca (if consent has been signed and submitted), as either of these resources may have potential contact information or ways to follow up on your client's whereabouts.

5) Are you preparing a plan for your client's release (i.e., for bail or following resolution)?

- The EMHC team is compiling a comprehensive list of community resources that may be of benefit to your client and will be available on the Alberta Courts Website or by contacting EMHC Duty Counsel
- Cyndi Brand (EMHC Justice Navigator) is also an excellent source for this purpose (email: cbrand@legalaid.ab.ca, phone: (780) 935-6019).

6) Are you awaiting a fitness assessment report for your client?

If so, you can email EMHC@ahs.ca to let the AHS liaisons know such that they can send the report to you as soon as it becomes available. Fitness assessments for clients whose lawyer is unbeknownst to AHS are, by default, disseminated to Crown Prosecutor and duty counsel for that day, as well as to the courtroom email.

7) Do you plan on having your client appear in court (in person or by phone or CCTV)?

- If so, please ensure that you have informed your client in cases where they are required to appear in person or by phone (e.g., for bail or probation check-ins).
- Please note that **clients at AHE can only be called until 4p.m.**
- Please understand that the typical court process of prioritizing senior counsel may not be followed in the EMHC in order to address matters in the most appropriate order.
- Additionally, while you may have several matters in various courtrooms, it is best to prioritize clients appearing in court with mental illness(es) as these individuals are more likely to become anxious or unwell while waiting for their matter to be addressed, especially if they are sitting in the courtroom. Similarly, clients who may be released should be dealt with as early as possible in order to avoid them being released at night with no resources.

8) Do your client's matters need to be addressed early or do you have documents that the Judge needs to read?

- Please let the clerk know if your matter needs to be addressed earlier for any reason (e.g., so the translator or client doesn't need to wait in the courtroom for too long, or so the client doesn't get released too late, etc.) or if you will be sending any necessary documents to the court for the Judge to read.

9) Does your client have a check-in but cannot be present to speak to the Judge themselves (e.g., due to illness or any other circumstances)?

- If this is the case, please collect the important information for a check-in from your client such that you can update the Judge on their behalf (i.e., where they live, if they've been going to appointments, what resources they're connected to, if they're taking their medications, etc.)

10) Does your client wish to withdraw their consent for the court to access their records?

- If this is the case, please make a note of their withdrawal and inform the AHS liaisons promptly by emailing EMHC@ahs.ca, such that they know not to share any further information.

11) Do you have any further questions about how the EMHC operates?

- If so, you are welcome to reach out to the EMHC duty counsel and Justice Navigator for information/clarification.
 - Amna Qureshi, EMHC Duty Counsel (aqureshi@legalaid.ab.ca)
 - Alyshah Somji, EMHC Duty Counsel (asomji@legalaid.ab.ca)
 - Cyndi Brand, EMHC Justice Navigator (cbrand@legalaid.ab.ca)