

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Navigating the Healthcare System



Medicare and BC Medical Services Plan

Medicare is a term that refers to Canada's publicly funded health care system. Instead of having a single national plan, we have 13 provincial and territorial health care insurance plans. If a service is considered medically necessary, the full cost must be covered by the public health care insurance plan.

In B.C., the healthcare plan for residents is the Medical Services Plan (MSP) and can be accessed by Canadian citizens, permanent residents, government-assisted refugees, international students with study permits, and those with work permits spanning 6 months or longer.

Learn more about MSP:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/health-drug-coverage/msp/bc-residents>

Enroll in Fair Pharmacare: <https://my.gov.bc.ca/ahdc/msp-eligibility>

Accessing Services

Family Doctors and Nurse Practitioners

Family doctors (sometimes called GPs – general practitioners) are doctors who you visit regularly for all general health concerns.

Nurse practitioners (NPs) are nurses with additional education and experience who are qualified to diagnose and treat illnesses, prescribe medication, order tests, and perform some medical procedures.



Specialists

A specialist is a doctor with additional training in a specific area of medicine (e.g. cardiologist, urologist, pediatrician, surgeon).

- A specialist typically requires a referral from a general doctor

Walk-in Clinics

A walk-in clinic is a place where you can see a general doctor for your health concerns (when you don't have access to a family doctor).

- Walk-in clinics are called “walk-in” because you used to be able to walk in to the office and wait your turn to see the doctor. However, most walk-ins now require calling or booking first thing in the morning to get a slot that day.
- Doctors at a walk-in clinic will not typically have access to all your medical history.
- You may not be able to see the same general doctor even if you go to the same walk-in clinic multiple times.

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Navigating the Healthcare System (continued)

Accessing Services

Urgent Care

Urgent care centres are another place where you can see a general doctor for your health concerns.

- Similarly to walk-in clinics, it is now common for urgent care centres to require phoning in first thing in the morning to be put on a list for urgent care treatment that day.
- Urgent care centres will treat people based on order of urgency, not first-come, first-served.

Hospitals

Hospitals offer a few main services:

- Emergency Care
 - The Emergency Room (ER) is for life threatening medical emergencies where patients are seen in order of urgency. Often, wait times can be very long. It is important to only use this service in the case of emergencies.
- Out-Patient Care
 - These are scheduled appointments in the hospital to see medical professionals and specialists during the day. This includes surgeries, blood tests, and x-rays.
- In-Patient Care
 - This is when a patient is admitted to the hospital overnight. This may include intensive care following a medical complication that requires monitoring and assistance for mental health/addiction emergencies.

Private and/or Specialized Clinics

Health services that are not considered “medically necessary” by the BC MSP operate out of private clinics; for example: physiotherapy, chiropractic care, massage therapy, counselling, naturopathy, etc. You can usually book an appointment at any time at these clinics without a referral, but may have to pay out of pocket or use private insurance.

Pharmacies

You can book appointments directly with a pharmacist for minor medical concerns that would require a prescription such as cold sores, acne, headaches, heartburn, etc.

- Appointments with pharmacists may be more readily available than with general doctors; these appointments can save you time if all you are looking for is a prescription or refill.

Telehealth

Telehealth refers to virtual appointments and phone appointments.

- Many telehealth options are available 24/7.
- Some function similarly to walk-in clinics offering an online waiting room or an opportunity to book appointments.
- Examples of telehealth services are:
 - Vivacare, Tia Health, TELUS Health

Public Health Units

Public Health Units are government organizations under the supervision of a local board of health. In BC, these organizations offer programs for disease prevention and general population health (rather than individual health) – like responding to COVID-19, or providing pre- and post-natal care.



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Regular Check-Ups



The importance of check-ups



Regular health check-ups are an important routine to build into your life. Check-ups can...

- allow for early detection of potential health problems before they become symptomatic
- provide an opportunity for health professionals to offer guidance on maintaining a healthy lifestyle
- include screenings and assessments that can identify risk factors for various diseases
- provide opportunities to monitor and manage chronic conditions

Diseases and conditions to keep an eye out for

- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Osteoporosis
- Cancer (skin cancer, breast cancer, cervical cancer)
- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

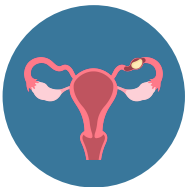
Reccomended check-ups and screenings

- Eye exams (every 2 years)
- Teeth cleanings and dental check-ups (1-2 times a year)
- STI testing (once a year – depending on age and sexual activity)
- Cancer screening (more details on next page)



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Cancer Screening



Cervix Screening

Cervix screening is one of the best ways to protect yourself from cervical cancer. Screening can help with...

- finding out if you are at risk for developing abnormal cells in your cervix,
- finding and treating abnormal cells early (which can help prevent cancer), and
- finding cancer at an early stage – before it can cause symptoms, and when there are more treatment options.

Cervical Health

Scan the QR code for more information on cervical health!



Who should get screened?

Anyone with a cervix between the ages of 25 and 69 should screen for cervical cancer every three or five years.

What to expect

Screening can be done through a pap test (which can be done by a doctor, nurse practitioner, registered nurse, midwife, or naturopathic doctor) or by using an at-home-kit.



Breast Cancer Screening

Breast screening can help catch cancer early when there are more treatment options.

- It is estimated that 1 in 8 BC women will get breast cancer in their lifetime.
- Mammograms can usually find lumps 2 or 3 years before you or your primary care provider can feel them.
- Research has shown a more than 25% reduction in deaths from breast cancer among those who regularly screen.

Breast Health

Scan the QR code for more information on breast health!



Who should get screened?

- If you are 40 – 50 years old with a first-degree relative with breast cancer, screening is recommended every year.
- If you are between the ages of 50 – 74, screening is recommended every 2 years.

What to expect

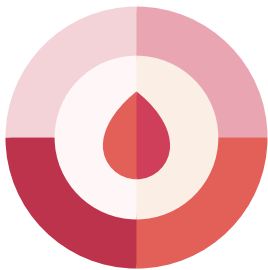
Screening is done at your local breast screening centre and will include questions pertaining to breast health, measuring of your height and weight, and taking an x-ray,

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Menstruation and Menopause

This is your menstrual cycle in 2 minutes

youtube.com/watch?v=WOi2Bwvp6hw



- A normal adult menstrual cycle is about 21 to 35 days long
 - A menstrual period can last about 4 to 6 days.
- On day 1 of your cycle, the thickened lining of the uterus starts to shed. You know this as menstrual bleeding from the vagina.
- Most of your menstrual blood loss happens during the first 3 days. This is also when you might have cramping or pain in your pelvis, legs, and back.
 - The cramping is your uterus contracting, helping the lining shed.
- Any change in your menstrual pattern or amount of bleeding that affects your daily life should be checked by a doctor. This can include:
 - Periods that last longer than 7 days.
 - Not getting your period for more than 3 months.
 - Bleeding when you don't expect to, such as between periods or after sex.
 - Pelvic pain that is not linked to menstrual bleeding and lasts longer than a day.

Menopause

Menopause is the point in your life when you permanently stop having menstrual periods. After 1 year of having no periods, you've reached menopause. In most cases, menopause happens around age 50. But everyone's body has its own timeline.

- Normal changes in your body cause menopause. You start to ovulate less often and your hormone levels fluctuate, causing changes in your periods.
- Menopause symptoms include hot flashes, trouble sleeping, and vaginal dryness.
- A healthy lifestyle can help you manage menopause symptoms.



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Sexual Health and Family Planning



Sexual Health and Safe Sex

Practicing safe sex means protecting yourself from sexually transmitted infections (STI/STDs) and unintended pregnancy.

- **Understands the risks**
 - Anyone who engages in sexual contact is at risk of catching STIs – STIs can be spread through skin to skin contact, oral sex, vaginal sex, and anal sex as well as from non-sexual activities such as using unsterilized needles for tattoos or piercings.
- **Use barriers such as condoms and dental dams**
- **Get regularly screened for STIs**

Birth Control

Birth control can be used to reduce the risk of pregnancy, control menstrual bleeding, or for other medical reasons (such as managing PCOS). Forms of birth control include...

- Hormonal birth control such as birth control pills, patches, vaginal rings, injections, and implants.
- Intrauterine Devices (IUDs) – an IUD is a small, plastic device that is inserted into the uterus to prevent pregnancy.
- Surgical methods such as tubal ligation (a permanent surgical procedure in which the fallopian tubes are obstructed, disconnected, or interrupted so that an egg cannot be fertilized by sperm).

Pregnancy and Family Planning

If you think you may be pregnant, you can take a pregnancy test at home or book an appointment to get tested at your doctor's office, walk-in clinic, or sexual health centre. Some common signs of pregnancy are missed/abnormal periods, breast tenderness, nausea/morning sickness, dizziness, fatigue.

Unplanned Pregnancy

Emergency Contraception

Emergency contraception (EC) is not advised for use as a regular method of birth control, but if you have had unprotected sex, emergency contraception can help prevent an unplanned pregnancy if used as soon as possible.

Abortion

If you are pregnant and you do not wish to continue the pregnancy, abortion is a legal option in Canada. There are two different types of abortion available: medical and surgical.

Planned Pregnancy

Doctors or midwives can provide pre-natal and post-natal care throughout pregnancy and birth.

Pre-Natal and Parenting classes/programs are also available such as...

- **Right From the Start**
islandhealth.ca/our-services/pregnancy-birth-services/right-start
- **Smart Mom**
islandhealth.ca/our-services/pregnancy-birth-services/smartmom

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Checking-in on different areas of our health



Sleep

Sleep is important for the health of your body and your mind. Getting enough sleep keeps your immune system strong, reduces your stress levels, and boosts your mood. Prioritize your sleep by...

- creating a healthy sleep area
- maintaining a bedtime routine
- limit daytime naps
- limit alcohol and caffeine

Eating Well

Eating healthfully supports our physical and mental health and can improve our energy and mood. A well-balanced diet provides the vitamins, minerals and other nutrients you need and includes:

- plenty of vegetables and fruit,
- whole grains foods, and
- protein (meat, dairy, and alternatives).

Physical Activity

Being active reduces your risk for many health conditions, improves your mood and helps you sleep better.

- Research recommends at least 150 minutes (2.5 hours) of moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity per week.
- Physical activity can include everyday activities like doing housework, grocery shopping or walking to work.
- Types of physical activity include aerobic (jogging, dancing, swimming), strengthening (lifting weights, resistance training), and balance and flexibility (stretching, yoga, pilates, tai chi).

Immunizations

Vaccines activate your body's immune system to protect you against bacteria or viruses that cause specific diseases and can help control and eliminate serious or life-threatening infectious diseases. Protect yourself by making sure that you receive the immunizations recommended by BC's public health experts based on your age.

Dental Health

Menstruation, pregnancy and menopause can affect the health of your teeth and gums. Cavities, gum inflammation and gum disease lead to pain and tooth loss and also increase your risk of more serious diseases, like oral cancer and diabetes. Keep your mouth healthy by...

- brushing your teeth 2x a day
- flossing your teeth every day
- visiting your dentist regularly
- avoiding smoking/chewing tobacco
- limiting sugary foods/drinks

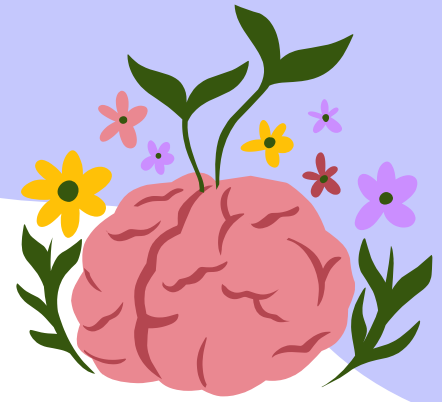
Bone Health

Maintaining bone strength is important as you age – by the time you reach your mid-40s, you lose bone faster than new bone is built. This is when your risk begins to increase for osteoporosis. To protect your bones...

- take Vitamin D and calcium,
- maintain a physically active lifestyle, and
- limit alcohol and smoking.

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Mental Health Resources



Mental Health

Mental health is an important part of your physical health and personal well-being. Mental illnesses are characterized by changes in thinking, mood, or behaviour associated with significant distress and impaired functioning. Mental illness can take many forms. Examples include: mood disorders, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders, personality disorders, eating disorders, depression, or substance dependency.

Support and Resources

You can support your own mental health and wellness through behavioural changes (such as physical activity and nourishing food), connection and community (maintaining healthy friendships and relationships, speaking to a counsellor, participating in community groups and events), and in some cases prescribed medication.

Activities

Regular physical activity can help you feel better, and reduces stress, anxiety and depression. Activities in groups can also help you connect with people and make new friends. You can stay active and move your body in so many different ways...

- walking, running, and hiking
- cycling
- tai chi and yoga
- swimming
- kayaking
- snow-shoeing
- bowling
- racquetball
- recreational or competitive sports (e.g. soccer, basketball, volleyball)
- dancing
- skating
- snowboarding and skiing
- mushroom picking
- gardening
- errands and chores (e.g. raking leaves, grocery shopping)

Counselling

Healing in Colour – healingincolour.com/directory

For immigrants, refugees, BIPOC, and queer individuals, finding a therapist who understands our lived experiences can feel next to impossible. Healing in Colour provides a directory of therapists who identify as people of colour and value intersectionality and anti-oppression.

Support Lines

Mental Health Support – Call 310 6789

This is a crisis line that provides emotional support, information and resources specific to mental health and substance use disorders.

1800 Suicide – Call 1-800-784-2433

This is a crisis line for individuals considering suicide, or for those who are concerned about someone who may be at risk of suicide.

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More Resources

BC Cancer Screening

bccancer.bc.ca/screening

BC Mental Health & Substance Use Services

bcmhsus.ca/our-services

BC Women's Hospital Health Centre – *Staying Healthy*

bcwomens.ca/health-info/staying-healthy

Canada's Food Guide

food-guide.canada.ca/en

Healing in Colour – Therapist Directory

healingincolour.com/directory

HealthLink BC – *Menstrual Cycle*

healthlinkbc.ca/illnesses-conditions/sexual-reproductive-health/normal-menstrual-cycle

Island Sexual Health

islandsexualhealth.org/clinic/

Medical Services Plan for B.C. Residents

www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/health-drug-coverage/msp/bc-residents

- **Apply for MSP or enroll in Fair Pharmacare**
my.gov.bc.ca/ahdc/msp-eligibility

Sex and U

sexandu.ca

Vancouver Island Women's Clinic

viwc.ca

Important Phone Numbers

911 - Emergency Services

811 - Health Information/Advice

988 - Suicide crisis helpline

