

# REFUGEE RESPONSE TEAM

Thompson Okanagan & Kootenays

## AN OVERVIEW OF HEALTHCARE SERVICES IN THE INTERIOR BRITISH COLUMBIA REGION

*We respectfully acknowledge and honour that we are collectively gathered on the traditional and unceded territories of the Indigenous people of what is colonially known as the Interior of British Columbia. We recognize that we have both learning and relationship building to do and are committed to doing this with humility and curiosity. Serving the social sector and striving to ensure all individuals and families are supported in leading healthy, productive and fulfilling lives, we commit to dismantling harmful systems and ways of thinking. We embrace the opportunity to learn from the Indigenous people who have stewarded these lands since time immemorial.*

This booklet was created by KCR Community Resources on behalf of the Refugee Response Team - Thompson Okanagan & Kootenays.



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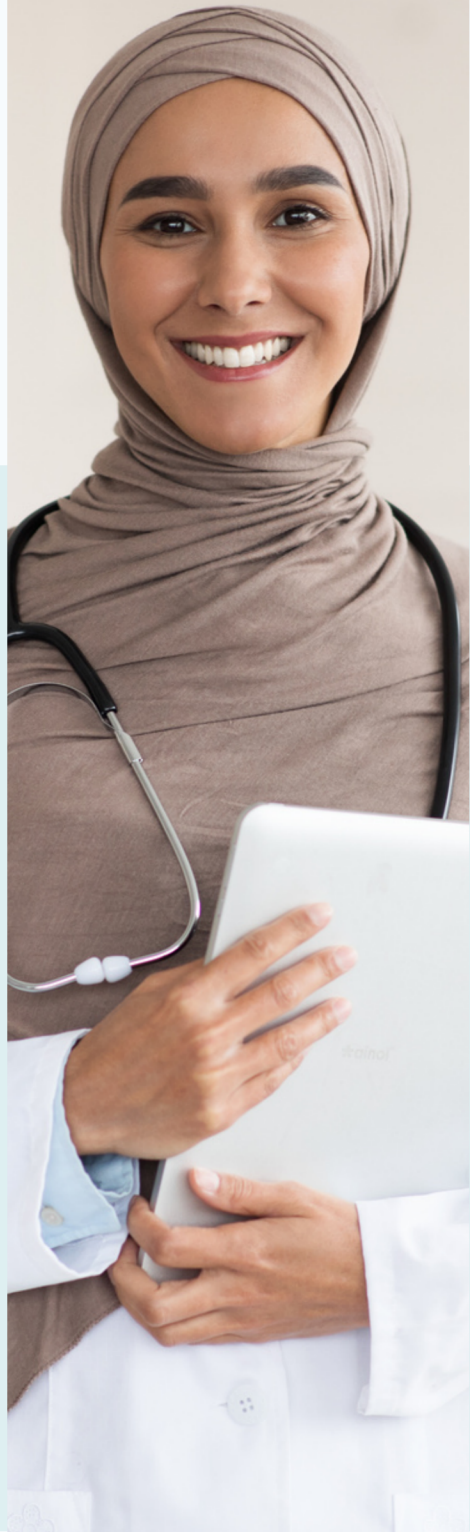


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## SETTLEMENT SERVICES

The Refugee Response Team – Thompson Okanagan & Kootenays (RRT-TOK) was created to meet the gaps and short-term needs for the successful settlement of new immigrants, including those from Afghanistan and displaced persons from Ukraine. Settlement services assist new arrivals to Canada in identifying and assessing their needs and provide newcomers with information, options, and referrals to relevant services and resources within the community. Settlement services support newcomers in becoming independent and active members of the community and provide essential skills, knowledge, and opportunities for community involvement while promoting cross-cultural understanding. These services assist new immigrants to Canada in identifying and assessing their needs and provide newcomers with information, options, and referrals to relevant services and resources within the community.



## THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM IN CANADA

Primary health care services are the first place people visit when they need help with their health. Primary health care has two main purposes. Firstly, it offers basic health care services such as preventing and treating common illnesses and injuries, providing basic emergency services, referring people to other levels of care (like hospitals or specialists), providing mental health care, end-of-life care, promoting healthy lifestyles, helping with child development, offering maternity care, and providing rehabilitation services. Secondly, it arranges other health care services for patients if needed. For example, if someone needs to see a specialist or go to the hospital, primary health care will make sure everything is coordinated and that the patient's care is seamless.

In Canada, there are two main types of doctors: Family Doctors (GPs) and Specialists. Family Doctors provide healthcare for patients of all ages, while Specialists have additional training in specific medical fields. Nurse Practitioners (NPs) also play a role in patient care, working alongside doctors or independently to provide a range of healthcare services. Together, these healthcare professionals ensure patients receive appropriate and timely care, based on their needs.

As a Canadian resident, your family doctor is the first person you turn to for medical care or advice. A family doctor provides basic care for you and your family and can also refer you to a specialist if you need one. To find a family doctor, you can visit the following link: <https://divisionsbc.ca/central-okanagan/our-impact/find-family-doctor>.

Walk-in clinics are also available for people who don't have a primary care provider. These clinics operate on a first-come, first-served basis, so you don't need an appointment.

If you need extra medical help, your primary healthcare provider may refer you to other healthcare services. This could include diagnostic tests or other medical professionals, like specialists, nurse practitioners, or other health care workers who aren't doctors or nurses.

The majority of dentists operate their own practices, and their services are not typically covered by the public health care system. However, if a person needs dental surgery while they are in the hospital, it may be covered.

The Interior Health (IH) Dental Program helps stop young kids' teeth from getting damaged. They have a team of dental experts who can help you and your child take care of their teeth. IH offers programs to teach caregivers and kids aged 0-4 how to keep their teeth healthy. (1)

# INSURANCE

To receive medical services in Canada, you need a health insurance card. However, there may be fees for dental and optometry services or specific medications. To access healthcare in the province of British Columbia, you must apply for a BC medical services plan (MSP), which is a type of medical insurance. Once approved, you'll receive a BC Services Card, which is necessary to use healthcare services. It may take up to three months to receive the card. Refugees can get temporary healthcare coverage through the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) for the first 12 months they are in Canada, and they can have both IFHP and MSP coverage at the same time. For more information about IFHP please visit <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/help-within-canada/health-care/interim-federal-health-program/coverage-summary.html>.

MSP is a government insurance program that pays for certain medical services people need. This includes services provided by doctors and midwives that are medically necessary, dental and oral surgery that's done in a hospital, eye exams if they are medically necessary, and some orthodontic services. MSP also covers diagnostic services like X-rays.



MSP may also cover other health care services provided by practitioners like acupuncture, chiropractic, massage therapy, naturopathy, physical therapy, and non-surgical podiatry. These are called supplementary benefits. Please find more information about MSP at [https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/health-drug-coverage/msp.\(2\)](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/health-drug-coverage/msp.(2))

## PROVINCIAL LANGUAGE SERVICES

The healthcare system in British Columbia provides free medical interpretation services for individuals who don't speak English fluently. Interpreters can assist with communication between patients and healthcare providers in person, over the phone, or via video. You can also bring along family or friends to help with non-medical conversations. These services are free and available at hospitals, public health units, and other healthcare facilities.

However, if you're visiting a private doctor or walk-in clinic, they may not have an interpreter for your language, or they may charge you for one. You can ask your family or friends or use the website: <https://www.cpsbc.ca/public/registrant-directory> to find doctors who speak your language. If this isn't possible and an interpreter isn't available, it's recommended to bring someone along who can translate for you during your appointment. (3)



## CULTURALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Healthcare providers can be male or female, so sometimes patients will get care from a provider who is a different gender. The healthcare staff will try to give patients a provider of the gender they prefer, but sometimes this is not possible. Regardless of the provider's gender, patients will still get good care. You are allowed to bring someone you know to appointments for support.

In British Columbia, there's a phone line called HealthLinkBC that you can call for free. When you dial **811**, you will speak to someone who can help you find health information and services. They can connect you to a nurse, dietitian, exercise expert, or pharmacist. These professionals can give you advice on how to manage your health concerns. The phone line is available 24/7, and you can get help in more than 130 languages. When you call, you'll talk to someone who speaks English, but you can ask for an interpreter in another language if you need one. (4)

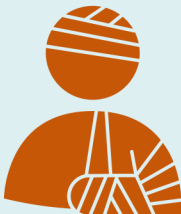
### AVAILABLE SERVICES IN CASE OF EMERGENCY



If you or someone you know has a serious injury or a condition that could be life-threatening, it's important to **call 911 right away**.



Examples of life-threatening conditions include chest pain that could mean a heart attack, trouble breathing that's really bad, uncontrollable bleeding, passing out or not being able to stay awake, signs of a stroke like sudden weakness or numbness, or a major injury like a bad head injury or lots of broken bones.



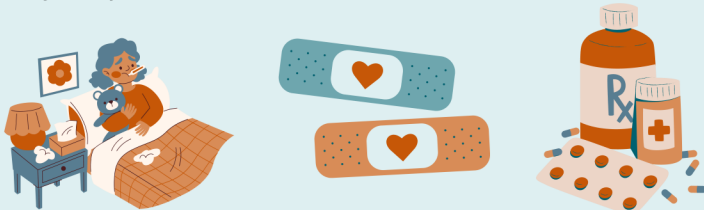
In these situations, don't wait - **contact 911 immediately** because they have the necessary medical care to help save lives.

(5)



If you have a non-urgent or life-threatening health issue that you believe should be addressed on the same day, such as minor pain like sore throats and earaches, minor injuries like sprains and small cuts requiring stitches, minor fevers, infections, upset stomach, sexual health concerns, or mental health issues like anxiety and mild to moderate depression, here are the steps you can take:

- Contact your family doctor or nurse practitioner and ask if they can give you an appointment for the same day.
- If your family doctor or nurse practitioner is not available, you can consider going to a nearby walk-in clinic if there is one.
- If you don't have a family doctor or nurse practitioner, can't go to a walk-in clinic, or can't get an appointment with your regular primary care provider that day, check if there is an Urgent and Primary Care Centre in your community. They may be able to help you.
- To get reliable health advice, you can call 8-1-1. HealthLink BC is always available to assist you.
- If you urgently need a refill for your medication, get in touch with your pharmacist.



Remember to prioritize your health and seek the right level of care based on how urgent your situation is.

Every time someone goes to the emergency department, it's different. The people who are the most seriously ill or injured are helped first, so you might have to wait longer than others. There could be moments during your visit when you have to wait. Not everyone, including both children and adults, will need to have tests done. No matter what you need, assistance and care will be provided to you. (6)

## PRIMARY HEALTH CARE IN INTERIOR HEALTH

Primary Health Care provides the basic healthcare services you need to stay healthy and manage any health concerns you have. It includes services like seeing your family doctor, getting help from a physiotherapist, or visiting a pharmacist or public health nurse. In each Primary Health Care centre, there's a team of healthcare professionals who offer a variety of services in one place. This makes it easier for you to get the care you need without having to go to different places. (7)

### PREGNANCY & INFANT CARE

Anyone who is pregnant is encouraged to visit a healthcare provider during and after their pregnancy. You can learn about healthy habits such as diet, giving birth, and baby care through prenatal classes. Regular tests during pregnancy are common and paid for by MSP to ensure everything is okay. Midwives are available in the Interior Health system and offer various services, including home birth or hospital birth. After birth, it's important to vaccinate the baby against diseases, and the vaccinations are covered by MSP. Seeking appropriate healthcare during pregnancy and after delivery is crucial, and there are many resources available in Interior Health to help you with this. (8)



## MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The Access Mental Health & Substance Use Services (MHSU) provided by Interior Health is a place where you can get connected to the services you need in a safe environment. To refer yourself, call 310-MHSU (6478) or visit your local MHSU Centre. Alternatively, you can talk to your family doctor or nurse practitioner and ask them to refer you.

When you reach out to MHSU, a clinician will ask you some screening questions, with your permission, to better understand your situation. Based on your answers, they will connect you with the appropriate team, program, or resources to support you.

If you need immediate emotional support, crisis intervention, or information about community resources, you can call the Interior Crisis Line Network at 1-888-353-2273. This helpline is available 24/7, every day of the week. It's a free and confidential service where you can get the help you need when you need it.

If you or someone you know is dealing with a serious mental health problem that is making them or others unsafe, or if there are severe withdrawal symptoms and trouble breathing, you should go to the nearest emergency room right away or call 911 for an ambulance. Getting help from professionals who know how to handle these situations can help you manage your mental health and improve your overall well-being. (9)



## SUBSTANCE USE SERVICES

To connect with the "Access MHSU Services" program for substance use support that suits your needs, you can call 310-MHSU (6478). This program will assist you in accessing the appropriate substance use services or make a referral on your behalf. Various programs are available, some allowing individuals to stay in their own homes while receiving assistance, while others require temporary relocation. These services can also help family members who are affected by a loved one's substance use. (10)

## HOME CARE

After an injury or illness, going home as soon as possible with the help you need gives you the best chance to regain your strength and independence, even if you can't do everything yourself. For people with health issues, age-related limitations, or disabilities, doing everyday tasks can be difficult. Community care health professionals can arrange for trained community health workers to provide support services at home so you can keep living there safely and independently.

Home support services include help with:

- Daily activities at home like bathing, dressing, and grooming
- Special exercises, taking medication, and other care needs
- Supporting and giving breaks to the person who usually takes care of you (11)



## IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

<p><b>911</b></p>	<p><b>For life-threatening emergencies</b>, call 911 or go directly to your nearest emergency department.</p>
<p><b>811</b></p>	<p><b>HealthLinkBC</b> Find health information and services.</p>
<p><b>1-888-353-2273</b> (1-888-353-CARE)</p>	<p><b>Interior Crisis Line Network</b> For immediate and urgent mental health assistance.</p>
<p><b>1-888-268-4319</b> (1-888-COVID19) Text: 1-604-630-0300</p>	<p>For information about B.C.'s response to COVID-19, visit <a href="http://gov.bc.ca/covid19">gov.bc.ca/covid19</a>, call 1-888-COVID19 or text 604-630-0300.</p>
<p><b>310-6789</b></p>	<p>Mental Health Support Line</p>
<p><b>310-6478</b> (310-MHSU)</p>	<p>Interior Health Mental Health &amp; Substance Use Central Line</p>
<p><b>1-800-661-2121</b></p>	<p><b>Here to Help</b> Mental health information line</p>
<p><b>1-800-663-1441</b></p>	<p>Alcohol and Drug Referral Line</p>
<p><b>1-866-585-0445</b></p>	<p><b>Wellness Together</b> Mental Health and Substance Use Support</p>
<p><b>604-872-1234</b></p>	<p><b>Seniors Distress Line</b> Confidential, non-judgmental emotional support 24/7 for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair.</p>
<p><b>1-800-567-8911</b></p>	<p><b>BC Drug and Poison Information Centre</b> 24/7 toll-free access to information about the effects of drugs and poisons and their treatment.</p>

# IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS CONT.

<p><b>1-800-784-2433</b>          (1-800-784-SUICIDE)  <b>Deaf or hearing-impaired:</b>          1-866-872-0113  <b>Text line:</b> 45645          11:00am - 11:00pm</p>	<p>Confidential, non-judgmental, free emotional support 24/7 for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including feelings which may lead to suicide.</p>
<p><b>1-800-668-6868</b></p>	<p><b>Kids Help Phone</b>          Immediate and caring support, information and, if necessary, referral to a local community or social service agency.</p>
<p><b>1-866-661-3311</b></p>	<p><b>Youth in BC Distress Line</b>          24/7 distress line for youths in crisis, staffed by counsellors and trained volunteers</p>
<p><b>1-888-795-6111</b>          Deaf and hearing-impaired call collect: 1-604-875-0885</p>	<p><b>Problem Gambling Help Line</b>          Information and referral service for anyone adversely affected by own or another's gambling habits.</p>
<p><b>BC Refugee Hub</b></p>	<p><a href="https://bcrefugeehub.ca/">https://bcrefugeehub.ca/</a></p>

## REFERENCES

- <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/health-care-system/reports-publications/health-care-system/canada.html>
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- <http://www.phsa.ca/our-services/programs-services/provincial-language-services#About-us>
- <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/more/contact-us/8-1-1>
- <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/information-for/patients-and-visitors/visiting-the-emergency-department#you-will-begin-the-admitting-registration-process>
- <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/information-for/patients-and-visitors/urgent-and-primary-care-centres>
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- <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/health-and-wellness/pregnancy-and-childbirth>
- <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/health-and-wellness/mental-health-and-substance-use/mental-health/adult-mental-health-services-and-resources>
- <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/health-and-wellness/mental-health-and-substance-use/mental-health/adult-mental-health-services-and-resources>
- <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/health-and-wellness/home-and-community-care/help-with-living-at-home>





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