

Medical Care for Refugees in Greater Victoria

Vancouver Island Refugee Response Team

Why provide medical services to Syrian refugees in Greater Victoria?

Syrian refugees have fled conflict in one of the greatest displacements of civilians since the Second World War. Canada has welcomed them as part of our humanitarian response to this crisis. By taking on one family, or one individual, your office can contribute to this effort. Currently very few General Practitioners are providing care but with more providers the load can be shared.

What should we expect when the patients come in?

Upon arrival, all Syrian refugees are initially screened for physical illnesses, including audiology loss and dental needs. The most common illnesses suffered are weakened functions of the heart, muscular pain, and overall nutrition. Someone who was living in a besieged neighborhood in Aleppo, or in a tent in a refugee camp, may have extensive health concerns. However, another person who left early in the conflict and was able to work in a neighboring country may have been able to access health care services - although this is less common.

- Through the effort and continued supports of Island Health Services, Nurse Practitioners Joanne Ripken and Charlotte Brown, in partnership with Department Leader of Island Health Connie Haselden and Medical Health Officer Dr. Dee Hoyano, have provided a full year of health care services to the majority of Syrian newcomer families. From the initial health screenings, they have been able to connect families to prenatal services, pediatric care, and mental health supports. They have managed the care for well over 100 individuals and have found support through translation services and the settlement support services offered through the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society and the Intercultural Association. Sustainable care is extremely vital to families continuing to make Vancouver Island their home.

How will we communicate with them? Are there interpreters?

There are in-person interpreters available, particularly for the first appointments. Later, when you are more comfortable with each other and they know what to expect, and as their English improves, an interpreter may not be necessary.

There is also the Provincial Language Services (PSL) which is a telephonic interpreter services for GPs and medical offices. This service is readily available and provides privacy of information with the patient as well as anonymity when discussing personal health care. Financial supports for the services are currently being inflated through potential partnership with the South Island Division of Family Practices.

Will we be paid?

Refugees in their **first year** have coverage:

- Under the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP)
- Additional coverage through a community group, such as a church, or a group of individuals who are supporting the family for the first year.

In their **second year** refugees may have coverage through

- Medical Services Plan (MSP)
- Employment
- Specialized benefits through provincial income support (Ministry link below).
- Enhanced specialized benefits through provincial disability benefits

Advocates and settlement worker are able to assist medical offices with the process of requesting specialized benefits.

Interim Federal Health Program IFHP dental coverage provides coverage for physician and hospital services, including referrals, emergency room visits and hospital admissions; laboratory and diagnostic services; and ambulance services. For a comprehensive list of services provided by the IFH Program, please click [here](#). For a complete list of specialized services offered through IFHP, please click here on the [benefit grid](#).

What next?

If you are thinking of taking on a refugee family, thank you!



- **If you would like to speak to someone who is already treating refugees and billing through IFHP, contact:**

Jo Ripken, Nurse Practitioner Island Health:

Charlotte Brown, Nurse Practitioner Island Health: Charlotte.Brown@viha.ca

- **If you would like further information about the Interim Federal Health Program:**

Provider Handbook: An explanation of the program, including how to register, who is covered, and how to submit claims. <http://providerifhpen.medavie.bluecross.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2016/09/IFHP-Information-Handbook-for-Health-care-Professionals-April-1-2016.pdf>

Grid of coverage: <http://providerifhpen.medavie.bluecross.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2016/09/Dental-Benefit-Grid.pdf>

Provider Portal: <https://provider.medavie.bluecross.ca/>

All documents and forms needed, including the Provider Handbook, are accessible through the above portal.

- **If you would like to speak to someone about the refugee resettlement**, in general or about other ways you could help, you may contact the Vancouver Island Refugee Response Team.
 - Alix Hotsenpiller, Coordinator, alix@vircs.bc.ca, (250) 361-9433, ext. 211
 - Andrea Westfall, Co-Coordinator, andrea@vircs.bc.ca, (250) 361-9433, ext. 209
 - Visit the Vancouver Island Refugee Response Team website <http://virrt.bc.ca>

- **If you are ready to take a refugee family as clients**, contact Settlement services at:
 - Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society, (250) 361-9433
 - Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria, (250)388- 4728.
 - Public Health, VIHA, Victoria Refugee Hub, Charlotte Brown, Nurse Practitioner

For information about this document, contact alix@vircs.bc.ca.