



SRP students' wellness info-sheet

All SRP students should be connected to the healthcare system and receive a full medical check-up after their arrival in Canada, which includes meeting a physician (specialized in refugee health or not), a dentist, an optometrist and a counsellor if they so desire. WUSC has prepared a letter that SRP students can choose to take to their first appointment with a physician. This letter will outline the key areas that are typically important for newcomers or refugees who may have lived for several years with limited access to adequate health care as some health professionals in Canada may not be familiar with refugee health issues. **The post-arrival medical appointment should be done within the first 2 months after arrival.** It is worth highlighting that the medical examination that SRP students have to go through overseas for immigration screening focuses on public health related medical issues and is not considered a full medical check-up.

This info-sheet contains information on:

- Preventive approach to wellness
- Health coverage SRP students can benefit from
- Family planning and sexual health
- Mental health and wellness

Preventive approach to wellness

Some SRP students may come from a background where the cost of seeing a health professional has been too high and/or the availability of quality health care services may be limited for refugees. Also, in some cases, the approach to health may be more reactive than preventive, which means that people tend to wait to be sick before consulting a health specialist. We encourage SRP students to take preventative measures and to go see health specialists upon arrival **before** becoming ill. This helps students understand how to take preventative care of themselves and ensures that students know who to contact when they do get sick. Review with students all the coverage they have (provincial health care, the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) and, potentially a school health coverage), and provide details around how to access them and make sure they know when they have to pay or not.

Health coverage

- **Provincial health insurance**

The Local Committee will help the student register for provincial health insurance as soon as possible after arrival in Canada. Provincial health care plans vary, but students will be eligible for coverage right away or at the latest, within three months. Information about applying for health care can be found on your provincial government's website. The student should be informed that most medical services in Canada are free of charge and that Canadians usually go for an annual

routine check-up as well as seeing a primary healthcare provider whenever they encounter a health problem.

- **Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP)**

The Canadian government provides an additional level of health insurance to all resettled refugees. The Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) provides emergency dental and additional health coverage for refugees during their one year sponsorship period in Canada. Resettled refugees are eligible for IFHP immediately upon arrival in Canada, prior to their qualification for provincial health insurance plan. The IFH Program provides refugees with health care supports, dental, vision, and pharmaceutical care for 12 months. Local Committees' experiences with the IFHP vary from one province to the next. Please note that IFHP will reimburse the medical practitioner or dispenser *directly*, not the patient or the Local Committee. When the student is covered by IFHP, the Local Committee should never pay out-of-pocket for health care. Some medical professionals are already registered for the IFHP and some may not have heard about it. Information on which medical professionals are already registered with IFHP can be found here: <https://ifhp-pfsi.medavie.bluecross.ca/en/search-ifhp-providers/>.

- **Other health insurance (e.g post secondary institution)**

Even though the SRP students are covered by the IFHP, we recommend that students do not opt out of the healthcare insurance that may be provided at their institution through tuition fees. Often this on-campus coverage will extend to prescription drugs, vision care, dental work, life insurance, etc. It is important that SRP students understand the coverage available on campus and that they know how to submit claims.

Family planning and sexual health

During the orientation, SRP students should be shown where they can find information and resources related to family planning and sexual health. Discussion about these issues may be delicate due to the life experiences and/or religious beliefs of either Local Committee members and/or the SRP student; however, finding a way to communicate information on birth control, sexual health and wellness, and sexually transmitted infections is highly important. There are gender-specific sexual health needs (which might include menstruation, gynecological exams, etc.) so it's important to consider what a female, male or non-binary students' needs may be and point out the appropriate services that are available on campus or in the community.

- **Safety and Consent**

It is important for all students to be aware of policies and services on campus related to sexual consent and maintaining healthy relationships with others. Sexual consent is "an active, affirmative, conscious, direct, unimpaired, and voluntary agreement to engage and continue to engage in sexual activity." SRP students as well as Local Committee members need to review and understand their campus' policy on consent and be aware of resources available to them on

campus and in the community related to sexual health and safety. This includes: sexual health centres; crisis and support services, including hotlines; police services; and campus “safe-walk” services, where students can request a walk home after dark, accompanied by student volunteers. Gender norms vary by culture of origin and/or asylum country, and some students may not have been involved in open discussions about sexual consent in the past. Some may feel more comfortable having discussions about consent with someone of the same gender, for example. Some newcomers may benefit from accessing mentors from within their cultural community and/or specialized services that employ a cross-cultural lens when discussing sexual consent to adjust to these differing comfort levels. It is important that the student and everyone in the Local Committee understand the legal implications of these issues and where they can go to seek additional assistance and guidance.

Mental Health and Wellness

The migration experience is inherently stressful and can have an impact upon newcomers’ mental health. Newcomers may experience feelings of social isolation and may struggle to adapt to a new culture. Several factors affect adaptation, including: managing expectations pre and post-arrival in a new country, interactions with the host community, connection with family back home, gender, age, the recency and intensity of particularly challenging or traumatic events, and the individual’s material and financial resources in the new country.

Many cultures and societies, including Canada, stigmatize mental and emotional health issues and mental illness. This stigma affects how likely people are to seek professional help for mental health challenges. In Canada, over the past several decades that has been a growing degree of recognition of the roles that psychiatrists, social workers, self-help groups, psychotherapists and counselors can play in this area. A psychologist or other specialist with a cross-cultural sensitivity, background or expertise could be helpful. Counselling services can also be accessed through:

- Student health and wellness centres on campus
- Family doctor
- International Students Office
- Psychiatrists / psychologists
- Immigrant-serving organizations
- Ethno-specific organizations
- Religious institutions