



HEALTH GUIDE

FOR

NEWCOMERS

TO NOVA SCOTIA



Western Regional
Enterprise Network

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TIP: Don't wait until you get sick to learn about the health care system!

Funded by



WELCOME TO NOVA SCOTIA!

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This guide will help you better understand the health care system and the services available in Nova Scotia. In this guide, you will find basic information to help you access appropriate health care services based on your needs. The information in this guide is not exhaustive, but it will give you a good overview of the different health care services available in the province.

The telephone numbers, website URLs and email addresses were valid at the time of writing. All of the resources mentioned in this guide can also be found on our web page **westernren.ca/programs/atlantic-immigration-pilot**.

Some health services are provided in multiple languages – please ask your health care provider. A complete copy of this guide is also available in French at **reseau.santene.ca/publications**.

Happy reading!



○ Health and Culture

Integrating into a new community or country, adapting to a new culture or learning a new language can be quite challenging.

Culture has a significant impact on health. Both health care professionals and patients are influenced by their respective cultures.

Different cultures have different ways of understanding health, illness and approaches to treatment. It is perfectly normal to feel a little overwhelmed by the amount of information to take in.

You should feel comfortable sharing your specific needs and questions with the health care professionals that you consult. Know that they will do everything they can to help you based on the resources available, the facility's policies and best practices.

⊛ **TIP: Don't hesitate to share your specific needs and questions with the health care professional you are seeing.**

HOW THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM IS STRUCTURED

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In Canada, all citizens, permanent residents and temporary workers (based on their status), have access to free publicly-funded health care services.

Canada has 13 public health insurance programs – one for each province and territory. Provincial and territorial governments manage the health care services in their province or territory.

Thanks to this system, Canadian residents have access to necessary medical and hospital services without having to pay.

○ Confidentiality and Protection of Personal Information

The information that you share with health care professionals is confidential and protected by the *Personal Health Information Act*. This information is only accessible to the health care professionals directly involved in providing you with health care services.

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○ Language of Service

Although Canada is officially bilingual (English and French), English is the primary language spoken in Nova Scotia.

The Nova Scotia Health Authority offers language interpreters for free. Interpretation is available 24/7 both face to face and through telephone. Tell the hospital staff or any other health services providers if you need an interpreter and one will be provided for you. If your doctor refers you for an appointment, they should specify on the referral form that you will require an interpreter.

✱ **TIP: When meeting with healthcare professionals, always ask if it is possible to be served in another language.**

○ Key Players in the Health Care System

Nova Scotia Health

Nova Scotia Health is the provincial public health authority with more than 45 different facilities.

Unlike public health care services, health care services offered by the private sector are not covered by public health insurance in most cases. For example, when you go to the dentist, optometrist or physiotherapist.

For more information, refer to section F – Private Health Care Services, on page 35.

nshealth.ca/about-us

IWK Health Centre

The IWK Health Centre in Halifax has a children's Emergency Department, women's health services and services for children and families. You can find lots of information on the services they offer on their website, including many resources that are available in different languages.

www.iwk.nshealth.ca

Réseau Santé - Nouvelle-Écosse

Réseau Santé brings together key stakeholders from the health care sector and the community to improve access to health care services in French for Acadians and francophones in Nova Scotia.

reseausantene.ca

Health Care Professionals in Private Practice

Some health care services, for example preventive medicine, pain management, eye care and dental care, and non-prescription medications, are offered privately. You must pay for these services.

For more information, refer to section F – Private Health Care Services, on page 35.

NOVA SCOTIA'S PUBLIC HEALTH INSURANCE

It is important to sign up for the free public health insurance program called MSI (Medical Services Insurance) as soon as possible after arriving in Nova Scotia. You can be eligible for the public health insurance from your first day in the province, based on your legal status in Canada and provided that you are living in Nova Scotia on a permanent basis.

When you use public health services, you must present your health insurance card, be it at the hospital, the clinic or the offices of health care professionals. It is recommended to have it on you at all times.

novascotia.ca/dhw/msi

TIP: Apply for your health card as soon as possible!



○ Eligibility for Nova Scotia's Public Health Insurance

To be eligible you must:

- Be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident. Some work permits that are valid for a period of 12 months or more may also make you eligible for the public health insurance (some conditions may apply to renew your coverage)
- Have your permanent and principal home in Nova Scotia (minimum 183 days / year)
- Be registered with MSI

Dependant children under 19 years of age automatically benefit from the same coverage as their parents once the parents have received their cards.

If you are a Canadian or permanent resident that is relocating to Nova Scotia on a permanent basis from another part of Canada, the coverage will generally begin the first day of the third month following the date you have moved here.

The following people are not eligible:

- tourists and people visiting the province
- people studying coming from other provinces (they are covered by their home province)

novascotia.ca/DHW/msi/eligibility.asp



○ International Students

International students with a study permit can sign up for the health insurance program from the first day of the 13th month following their arrival in Nova Scotia.

Coverage only lasts one year and must be renewed each year by the individual.

Only health care and costs incurred in Nova Scotia will be reimbursed by the province. The individual is responsible for costs incurred in other provinces.

International students are encouraged to speak to their educational institution for more details on the coverage offered and the different criteria used.

novascotia.ca/DHW/msi/moving_travel.asp

⊛ **TIP: Get in touch with your university / educational institution to find out if health care is covered!**

○ Registering for Public Health Insurance

It is important to apply for your health insurance card from MSI as soon as possible after you arrive in the province.

You must apply over the phone. A separate form must be completed by each person aged 19 and over. Services are available in several languages through a third-party language interpretation service.

You must complete the application form (in English only) and present photo identification for citizenship or immigration.

Your health insurance card must be presented to health care professionals before receiving insured services.

✱ **TIP: Apply for your health insurance card from MSI as soon as possible after your arrival in the province.**

✱ **TIP: When you contact MSI, ask to speak to somebody in your language. Services are available in several languages through a third-party language interpretation service. Phone 902-496-7008 or toll free at 1-800-563-8880.**

○ Renewing or Replacing Your Health Card

Nova Scotia health cards are valid for four years.

The expiration date is based on the period of validity of the card and not necessarily the person's eligibility. Renewal notices will be sent three months before the expiration date. There are no fees for renewing your card.

In the event that your card is lost or stolen, get in touch with the MSI Registration and Enquiry Department by telephone at **902-496-7008** or **1-800-563-8880**, or by email at

MSI@medavie.ca.

Office hours: Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The fee for replacing a lost or stolen card is \$10.



*** TIP: If your card is lost or stolen, get in touch with the MSI Registration and Enquiry Department right away by telephone at 902-496-7008.**

What is Covered by Nova Scotia's Public Health Insurance?

Nova Scotia's public health insurance pays for the following medical services when they are medically necessary:

- consultations with primary care health professionals
- some dental and optometric services
- consultations with specialists you are referred to by a primary care health professional
- certain services offered by hospitals to people requiring care at an external clinic or a hospital stay
- all obstetrics care
- all screening tests

For more information or when in doubt, get in touch with the MSI office at **1-800-563-8880** or refer to the electronic brochure at **novascotia.ca/dhw/msi/docs/MSI_Brochure.pdf**.

The following products and services are not covered by Nova Scotia's public health insurance:

- prescription medications
- hearing aids
- ambulance services: only transfers from one hospital to another are covered
- circumcision of a newborn
- elective plastic surgery and other cosmetic treatments
- regular dental care
- orthopedic prostheses or aids, artificial limbs or items such as walkers and crutches and special orthotics
- eye care: no coverage for glasses, contact lenses or general eye exams
- paramedical care provided by chiropractors, private duty nurses, massage therapists, naturopaths, opticians, optometrists, orthodontists, osteopaths, pharmacists, physiotherapists, chiropodists and psychologists

This list is not complete. For more information on whether public health insurance covers the costs of a specific health service, check with your health care professional, the health care facility or refer to the brochure at novascotia.ca/dhw/msi/docs/MSI_Brochure.pdf.



TIP: Always ask questions about what is covered by public health insurance or the cost you will be responsible for when a health care professional suggests health care services, medications or treatments.

Coverage and Billing While Travelling

In Canada (except Quebec)


All provinces except Quebec have signed an interprovincial billing agreement. If you show your current provincial medical insurance card to health care professionals for insured medically necessary services, they will be paid by the host province and then reimbursed by the home province.

If you must pay the health care professional, submit your receipt to MSI for review. If you have any questions, call MSI's Registration and Enquiry Department at **902-496-7008** or at **1-800-563-8880** (toll free in Nova Scotia).

Outside of Canada

If you are travelling outside of Canada for a short period of time, MSI will only cover emergency medical services, based on Nova Scotia's rates. The Children's Oral Health program, Seniors' Pharmacare program and Family Pharmacare program do not provide coverage outside of the province.

If you plan to leave Nova Scotia for a prolonged period, get in touch with MSI Registration and Enquiry before leaving, so that your eligibility can be clarified and the duration of coverage determined. You can reach them by telephone at **902-496-7008** or at **1-800-563-8880** (toll free in Nova Scotia).

 **TIP: It is strongly advised to sign up for private travel insurance to cover health care costs when you travel outside of Canada.**

Temporary Absences from Nova Scotia

For temporary absences from Nova Scotia, it's important to inform Nova Scotia's public health insurance to maintain your eligibility under the program.

Once you are considered a resident or Canadian resident for MSI coverage and normally present (physically present in Nova Scotia for 183 days per calendar year), you can maintain your coverage during your temporary absence for up to a year, provided that you intend to return permanently to Nova Scotia.

For more information, refer to:

novascotia.ca/DHW/msi/moving_travel.asp

- * TIP: Let Nova Scotia's public health insurance know if you will be away temporarily to maintain your eligibility under the program.**





REFUGEES

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The Interim Federal Health Program provides limited and temporary health insurance coverage to refugees, protected persons, asylum seekers, as well their dependants.

Immigration and Citizenship Canada:

www.canada.ca/en/services/immigration-citizenship.html

PRIVATE HEALTH INSURANCE

For care and services that are not covered by Nova Scotia's public health insurance, it is highly recommended to obtain additional private insurance. Private insurance can cover expenses such as:

- prescription medications
- dental care
- eye care
- physiotherapy, psychology and massage therapy services
- ambulance services

Check with your employer or educational institution, because many provide health insurance to cover the costs mentioned above.

○ To find a health insurance provider:

- visit the Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association's website at www.clhia.ca

NOVA SCOTIA PHARMACARE

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Pharmacare is Nova Scotia's drug insurance program. Pharmacare helps Nova Scotia residents pay for the costs of medications and prescribed devices. Pharmacare includes five programs:

- Seniors' Pharmacare program: helps registered members aged 65 and over pay for their prescription medications
- Family Pharmacare program: helps families pay for their prescription medications
- Assistance for Cancer Patients program
- Palliative Care Drug program: helps cover the costs of medications required for end-of-life care at home
- Department of Community Services Pharmacare Benefits for people receiving social assistance

TIP: For any questions relating to MSI's Pharmacare coverage, call 1-800-544-6191.

For more information:

Telephone: 902-429-6565

1-800-544-6191 (toll free)

Mail: Nova Scotia Pharmacare Programs

PO Box 9322, Halifax, NS B3K 6A1



HOME CARE AND LONG-TERM CARE SERVICES

Home care includes: home support (personal care, relief, housekeeping, etc.), nursing care (wound dressings, catheters, parenteral therapies, etc.) and oxygen therapy at home. A care coordinator will assess needs, put in place services and ensure follow-up care.

Long-term care includes accommodation, supervisory care, personal care and nursing care, and is offered to people who are no longer able to live independently in the community.

For more information on these services, telephone **1-800-225-7225** or visit novascotia.ca/dhw/ccs/.

TIP: For more information on home care (home support, long-term care or nursing care), call 1-800-225-7225.



EMERGENCIES

911

If your state of health (or that of the person who requires care) is preventing you from travelling, you must call emergency medical services by dialing **911** on your telephone (available free-of-charge 24 hours a day, seven days a week). They will help you determine the services you need.



This number is toll free, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week everywhere in Canada and North America. 911 call takers (operators) have access to interpreters in more than 170 languages.

Website: beta.novascotia.ca/911-emergency-when-call

*** TIP: For all emergency situations, call 911 and ask for services in your language.**

○ Ambulance Services

In emergency situations where an ambulance is required, call **911**. People transported by ambulance are responsible for their own transport costs. The public health insurance program does not cover this service. You will receive a bill from Emergency Health Services after being transported to hospital.

For more information:

novascotia.ca/dhw/ehs



Hospital Emergency Department

If you require emergency medical care and you are able to travel, make your way quickly to the Emergency Department at the hospital nearest to you.

The Emergency Department is an immediate care unit that is always open. If you go to Emergency, know that the wait times can be unpredictable. How long you will have to wait will depend primarily on the severity of your state of health and that of the other people waiting for care. On your arrival, an assessment of your state of health will be conducted to determine the level of severity.

Only go to the Emergency Department for True Emergencies

If your health issue is not truly urgent, it is not recommended to go to the hospital Emergency Department. You will therefore avoid needless travel and long wait times at the Emergency Department. Instead, you should call **811** or make your way to a walk-in clinic.

List of Nova Scotia hospitals:
novascotia.ca/dhw/about/hospitals.asp

811 Service

If you are not sure if you should go to the Emergency Department, call **811**. Trained nurses will ask you questions on your state of health, will give you advice and will direct you to the appropriate resources. Services are available in French through bilingual staff or many other languages through a third-party language interpretation service.

Other options available to you:

- consult a pharmacist (for certain issues)
- visit a walk-in clinic

By calling **811**, you can get trustworthy advice and information on health, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

A registered nurse will take your call, assess the severity of the person's symptoms or state of health and will advise you on the next steps to take, for example, appropriate self-care, seeing a health care professional or going to the Emergency Department.

All calls are free and confidential. You do not need a Nova Scotia health card.

For more information, refer to the website:

811.novascotia.ca

Useful Numbers

Telecare	Emergency/Ambulance	Poison Control Centre
811	911	1-800-565-8161



○ Virtual Care Nova Scotia

VirtualCareNS is a free, virtual primary care service managed by Nova Scotia Health. VirtualCareNS (VCNS) provides temporary access to primary medical care to people on the Need a Family Practice Registry until they find a family doctor or nurse practitioner.

Participation in VirtualCareNS does not affect your place in the registry. People are contacted by email to sign up to VirtualCareNS in chronological order, based on the date they signed up to the Need a Family Practice Registry.

Thanks to VirtualCareNS, primary care providers can prescribe medications, order tests and refer patients to in-person care or specialist care. For more information, including on how to access VirtualCareNS, refer to ***www.VirtualCareNS.ca*** or call **1-888-755-8555**.

For more information, go to:
nshealth.ca/content/virtualcarens

211 Service

211 is your your 24/7 connection to the programs and services in your community that matter the most to you.

When you call **211**, you will be directed towards resources, programs and services in your community that best meet your needs.

211 is a free and confidential service. Telephone interpretation services are also available in more than 100 languages.

Website: ns.211.ca

TIP: For information on programs and services in your community, call 211 (a free, confidential service).



○ Emergency Preparedness Kit

The Canadian Red Cross recommends that you have an emergency kit in your home and have enough provisions on hand to meet your family's needs for at least 72 hours.



For useful recommendations for emergencies or to buy an emergency kit:

www.redcross.ca

You can find more details and information on preparing for disaster situations on the Canadian Red Cross website:

www.redcross.ca/how-we-help/emergencies-and-disasters-in-canada/be-ready-emergency-preparedness-and-recovery/make-an-emergency-plan

○ Cold-Related Emergencies

Newcomers sometimes underestimate the harshness of winter. It's important to know how to prevent emergencies from exposure to the cold, recognize the signs of an overexposure to the cold and know how to provide assistance when needed.

Refer to the Red Cross website to learn about the topic and fully take advantage of winter:

www.redcross.ca/training-and-certification/first-aid-tips-and-resources/first-aid-tips/cold-related-emergencies-staying-warm-and-safe-in-canadian-winters



○ The IWK Children's Hospital in Halifax

The IWK Health Centre in Halifax has a children's Emergency Department and offers health care services for women, youth, and families.

Interpretation and translation services are available for IWK patients and families whose first language is not English.

To contact the IWK, you can:

- Visit them in person: 5850/5980 University Avenue, Halifax
- Reach them by telephone: **902-470-8888** or toll free **1-888-470-5888**
- Website: **www.iwk.nshealth.ca**

The reception staff can direct you to health interpretation services available at the IWK.

○ Medic Alert

If you have a serious illness, like diabetes, hypertension or an allergy to medications or other products, ask your health care professional or the hospital about the Medic Alert bracelets or refer to the [medicalert.ca](https://www.medicalert.ca) website. Important information about your health is engraved on them for use in emergencies.



○ Elder Abuse Information and Referral Line

Call to get information on elder abuse or to speak about an elder abuse situation. Your call will remain confidential. Leave a message if no one answers the phone. It is not a crisis line. The Nova Scotia Department of Seniors can provide you with information on resources in your community. Call **211** toll free in Nova Scotia.

Website: ns.211.ca

ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES

When the situation is not an emergency, there are many ways to access health care services. Your best option is to go to your family doctor but if you don't already have one, walk-in clinics can be a solution. Know that some private professions, such as dentists, physiotherapists, massage therapists, opticians, etc., can be accessed without a referral from a doctor. Have a look through the following chapters to learn more about the different ways to access health services.

TIP: The *Bonjour!* and *Bonjour/Hello* logos are used by French-speaking health care professionals. If you speak French, don't hesitate to communicate with them in French.



Health care is divided by level of care.

EXAMPLES

Primary Care

Access to health care professionals without a referral: family doctors, nurses, pharmacists and health information and advice lines

Secondary Care

Access to health specialists with a referral from a primary care provider only: cardiologists, endocrinologists and oncologists



○ The Family Doctor

Family doctors are the entry point to the health care system for you and your family. It is important that you quickly take steps to find a family doctor (see the following chapter).

Family doctors can help you with many common diseases and advise you on pregnancy, family planning, nutrition, physical exams, immunizations and emotional problems. Family doctors are also trained to treat chronic health issues such as diabetes, hypertension, depression, weight loss and asthma.

These services include routine exams, vaccines, blood tests or monitoring medical conditions. To see a specialist, you will first have to consult a family doctor who will refer you to a specialist.

TIP: When you meet your family doctor, remember that:

- The consultation is free with your health card (paid for by public health insurance)
- Ask your doctor to prescribe the lowest cost form of medication
- Let your doctor know about any health issues or allergies
- Ask questions

○ How do you find a family doctor?

Nova Scotia Health's "Need a Family Practice Registry" is a registry for people who do not have a family doctor. Once you are registered you will be added to the list. When a family doctor in your region is taking new patients, Nova Scotia Health will contact you by telephone and/or by email. They can also occasionally contact you to update your personal information or to confirm that you need to remain in the registry. You can sign up for the registry online at needafamilypractice.nshealth.ca or by calling 811.

Be aware that many people are waiting for a doctor in the province and that the wait times can be long.

- ✱ **TIP: Register for the "Need a Family Practice Registry" to find a family doctor as soon as possible.**





To Find French-speaking Health Care Professionals

A directory of French-speaking health care professionals is available on Réseau Santé – Nouvelle-Écosse's website
reseausantene.ca/repertoire

French-speaking family doctors may also use Réseau Santé's Bonjour/Hello logo.

○ While Waiting for a Family Doctor

Other free options are available to you based on how urgently you need care and the health care professional you are seeing:

- walk-in clinics
- community health centres
- 811 service: ***811.novascotia.ca***
- a pharmacist

○ Walk-in Clinics

Walk-in clinics provide services and care to people who do not have a family doctor or who cannot get an appointment with a family doctor quickly enough. Walk-in clinics serve clients based on the principle of first come, first served. Walk-in clinics provide non-emergency care outside of normal working hours. It is preferable to call before going, even though these clinics do not require an appointment. To find a list of walk-in clinics in your region, call **811** or visit:

nshealth.ca/search/google/walk-in%20clinics

○ Missed Appointments

If you must cancel or postpone an appointment, let the health care professional or service where you have an appointment know at least 24 hours in advance. More and more health care professionals are now charging fees when patients do not show up to appointments.

WARNING! Health care facilities in Nova Scotia are smoke-free and vape-free environments. If you would like to quit smoking, call 211 to find resources.



Medical Specialists

To see a medical specialist (e.g. a cardiologist or neurologist), you must first see your family doctor or a doctor at a walk-in clinic. They will assess the state of your health and refer you to a specialist if they deem it necessary.



Community Health Centres

In certain communities in Nova Scotia, there are health centres where you can see a doctor or nursing staff and receive some basic care. To access the services provided by these health centres, you must make an appointment by telephone.

The list of health centres and their contact details can be found on this website:

nshealth.ca/search/google/community%20health%20centres

PRIVATE HEALTH SERVICES

Unlike the public health services covered by Nova Scotia Health, the patient must pay private health care professionals when they see them. This is the case when you see a dentist or physiotherapist. Private medical clinics work on the same model.

However, one can turn to private care for health care services that already exist in the public system, like private medical clinics, for example, for several reasons: if the patient does not have a family doctor or is not insured by MSI, if the wait times in the public system are too long or simply for personal reasons, etc.





Dentists

Dental care is not covered by Nova Scotia's public health insurance. You can sign up for additional insurance to cover the costs of dental care. Ask your insurer or employer to find out what dental care is covered by your insurance.

The Dalhousie Dental Clinic at Dalhousie University offers dental care services provided by students under the supervision of qualified dentists. These services are less expensive than dental care at a dentist's office. Contact Patient Services at **902 494-2101** or visit their website at [***dal.ca/faculty/dentistry/patients.html***](http://dal.ca/faculty/dentistry/patients.html) to make an appointment.

Additional information is available on the Nova Scotia Dental Association website. [***nsdental.org***](http://nsdental.org)

Nova Scotia Children's Oral Health Program

All children aged 14 and under with a valid MSI health card number are eligible for the Nova Scotia Children's Oral Health Program.

For children from birth until age 15, the program covers the following once per year:

- One routine dental exam
- One fluoride treatment (a second treatment can be administered in certain cases)
- Two routine X-rays
- Instructions for brushing and using dental floss and/or cleaning

For more information, refer to the dental facts sheet: Nova Scotia Children's Oral Health Program or call **1-833-739-4035** toll free (8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.).

Visit novascotia.ca/dhw/healthy-development/documents/DentalFactsMSIChildren_En.pdf





○ Optometrists / Ophthalmologists / Opticians

It is sometimes difficult to understand the difference between optometrists, ophthalmologists and opticians. Here is some information to help you determine who to see to take care of your eye health.

Optometrists

Optometrists are frontline care staff when it comes to eye and vision health. Optometrists conduct eye exams and prescribe the necessary vision correction. Optometrists also conduct examinations to assess eye health. For some eye diseases, they work in collaboration with ophthalmologists, specialist doctors or eye surgeons. ***nsoptometrists.ca***

Optalmologists

Optalmologists are specialist vision and eye treatment doctors who perform surgical and medical procedures, as well as diagnose, treat and help prevent of the most serious eye diseases, such as macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma. To see an opthalmologist, you must be referred by an optometrist or family doctor.

Opticians

Thanks to specialized training in optics, opticians are able to recommend and adjust clients' frames and advise them in making choices based on their needs. They can sell glasses and contact lenses according to prescriptions from optometrists or opthalmologists. They do not assess, diagnose or treat vision problems.





○ Pharmacists

Pharmacies in Canada are places where you can get prescription medications, non-prescription medications and many other products and services.

Pharmacists do much more than provide advice on medications. They can assess, treat and if needed, prescribe medication for different minor physical conditions.

Your pharmacist can also help you monitor the state of your health by conducting tests for different conditions like diabetes, asthma, cholesterol and high blood pressure.

List of pharmacies in Nova Scotia: [*pans.ns.ca*](https://pans.ns.ca)

⊛ **TIP: Don't hesitate to ask about the cost of a service or medication and what is covered under the health card before paying.**

MENTAL HEALTH

Immigrating and settling in a new country and learning about a new culture can be quite challenging. When you're immigrating or integrating, some personal and social factors can have a significant impact on your sense of balance and emotional well-being: finding a place to live, getting a job, having your professional training recognized, learning a new language, learning to live far away from your loved ones who stayed in your home country, etc.

It is important to seek help. Many resources are available in the community (211 service) to help you overcome challenges. Also, know that in Canada efforts are being made to break taboos and prejudice that remain about mental health.

If you (or a member of your family) feel anxious, depressed or overwhelmed with stress, speak to your doctor or an adviser from a settlement agency.

It is important to see a mental health professional when:

- your negative emotions are affecting your relationships with your family or friends
- your child's mental health or the mental health of one of your loved ones worries you
- the severity of the problems persists and seriously affects your day-to-day functioning
- the distress and despair are overwhelming
- you are having suicidal thoughts

Nova Scotia Health

Thousands of mental health and addictions experts provide support, programs, and services to Nova Scotians from throughout the province. You're not alone. They are there to help you.

See all of the resources available:

mha.nshealth.ca

Helplines

The following helplines are offered free-of-charge every day, 24 hours a day. You can also make your way to the closest Emergency Department.

- Emergency mental health and addictions line
1-888-429-8167
- Kids Help Phone
1-800-668-6868
or text **686868**
kidshelpphone.ca
- Emergency: **911**
In the event of an emergency, don't hesitate to call **911**



Réseau Santé's Mental Health Guide

Réseau Santé – Nouvelle-Écosse has developed a French-language guide of mental health resources, which is available online: **reseausantene.ca/publications**

TIP: In the event of an emergency or crisis, call **911** or go to the closest hospital's Emergency Department.



Mental Health and Addictions Centres

Community mental health and addictions centres have teams of mental health and addictions professionals who provide outpatient services. Health care staff offer assessment, diagnostic and treatment services, as well as outreach services that can help people manage mental illness, addictions and related disorders.

If you need help with a mental health or addictions problem, call the mental health and addictions reception service at **1-855-922-1122** – the team is there to help you. Health care staff will also help you determine which services and supports best meet your needs.

Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Don't hesitate to leave a message in the evenings, on weekends or on holidays.

Visit the Nova Scotia Health website for more information:
mha.nshealth.ca/en/services

Call **911** at any time in the event of an emergency.

○ Psychologists

You can also see a psychologist in private practice. Nova Scotia's public health insurance does not cover these consultations. Psychologists are experts in behaviour, emotions and mental health. Psychologists work with people who are experiencing distress or psychological problems. Their training allows them to understand human behaviour and the best ways to help their clients resolve their psychological problems. For more information or to find a psychologist in your region, refer to the Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia website: apns.ca



Other Resources

Canadian Mental Health Association:
cmha.ca

Nova Scotia Health:
mha.nshealth.ca
mha.nshealth.ca/en/services

SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND ADDICTIONS

If you are directly or indirectly (spouse, parents or friends) affected by alcohol consumption or drug, medication or tobacco use and/or gambling, various free, specialized and confidential services are available to help you.

You can speak to a professional or call **811** or the addictions treatment centre in your region.

Gambling Information Line

Call **1-888-347-8888** to get free and confidential information on gambling and to be directed towards appropriate support services.



Visit Nova Scotia Health's website for more information:
mha.nshealth.ca



PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

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In Nova Scotia, community services offer several provincial health programs for people with disabilities. The Disability Support Program (DST) serves children, youth and adults with intellectual disabilities, long-term mental illness and physical disabilities in a range of community-based, residential and day programs. For more resources, visit:
novascotia.ca/coms/disabilities/index.html

These are voluntary programs designed to support people at various stages of their development and independence.

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HAVING A CHILD



○ Before the Birth of the Child

Pregnancy can be a wonderful experience, but it is also a period of uncertainty and change, especially in a new country.

Nova Scotia's public health insurance covers the costs of prenatal care, childbirth and postnatal care.

If you think you are pregnant you can first go take a pregnancy test available in pharmacies. If this test is positive, get in touch with your family doctor or health care professionals at a walk-in clinic. They will be able to confirm the pregnancy and estimate the delivery date. What's more, they will examine you and explain the medical follow-ups

that will take place over the following months. Seeing a doctor early will help you adapt your lifestyle and take the necessary steps to have a healthy pregnancy.

Be aware that if your pregnancy is low risk, you can choose to give birth to your child at home or at the hospital.

*** TIP: If you think you may be pregnant, you can first take a pregnancy test that is available in pharmacies.**

*** TIP: If you learn that you are pregnant, get in touch with your family doctor or go to a walk-in clinic.**

The IWK

The IWK is a university health sciences centre located in Halifax, which is committed to the highest standards of care, research and specialist education in maternity and pediatric care. Interpretation services are free and available 24 hours a day, you just need to tell them when you making your appointment.

iwk.nshealth.ca

*** TIP: Interpretation services are free and available 24 hours a day at the IWK Health Centre.**



Prenatal Clinics

There are prenatal clinics throughout the province that provide care and information to pregnant women and their families during pregnancy. Once your pregnancy is confirmed, your family doctor will direct you to a prenatal clinic. These clinics provide a good framework for mothers to receive quality care and help future mothers and their families make informed decisions.

At each visit, you will see a health care professional. They will assess you and your growing baby. They will also give you information on your pregnancy and answer your questions.

If you are pregnant and you do not have a family doctor, call a prenatal clinic close to you to make an appointment.

nshealth.ca/content/prenatal-clinics

○ Midwives

Midwives are trained to take care of women with a normal pregnancy and their healthy newborns. They work closely with prenatal clinics as well as health care professionals.

To access the services of a midwife, you can get a referral from your family doctor, a health care professional at a walk-in clinic or contact the team of midwives in your region.

Midwives' services are free for Nova Scotia residents with provincial medical services coverage (MSI). As health care professionals, midwives are part of the health care system funded by the province.

Please note that if you are located in Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), the IWK provides midwifery services.

You may be able to access the services of a midwife based on your place of residence. For more information: mrcns.ca

Directory of midwives:

mrcns.ca/find-a-midwife

Midwifery in Nova Scotia:

novascotia.ca/dhw/primaryhealthcare/midwifery.asp

Doulas

Doulas are qualified professionals who provide ongoing physical, emotional, and informational support to a mother before, during and shortly after childbirth to help her have the healthiest and most satisfying experience possible.

Directory of doulas:

novascotiadoulas.org/labor-doula

Nova Scotia Doula Association:

info@novascotiadoulas.org



Prenatal Courses

Prenatal courses are free and aim to prepare parents to have a good pregnancy, birth and first few days with their child. They are not required but are highly recommended for your first pregnancy. In addition to helping prepare for your birth, they will allow you to connect with other future parents.

The “Welcome to Parenting” program provides online prenatal training and support for parents during the first year of their baby’s life. It allows new parents to connect with others online and share their experiences. They can also have their questions answered by health, parenting and child development experts.

The program is free for all pregnant women and their partners living in Nova Scotia. You can sign up at

novascotia.welcometoparenting.com

Website with resources:

nshealth.ca/service-details/Prenatal%20Clinics

Involvement of the Second Parent throughout the Pregnancy and Childbirth

Health care professionals encourage the second parent to get involved and actively take part in preparing for childbirth. It is completely normal for them to accompany future mothers to the various appointments for medical follow-ups, ultrasound scans, prenatal courses and childbirth. It is up to the couple to decide what they would like to do or not. It comes down to respecting each other’s needs without imposing anything that would cause stress.

Breastfeeding

It is important to consider the advantages that breastfeeding can provide during your pregnancy. Breastfeeding is a common practice in Canada and mothers have a right to breastfeed their baby in public. Ask your doctor if you have any questions.

You can find lots of useful information at:

novascotia.ca/dhw/healthy-communities/healthy-eating-breastfeeding.asp.

La Leche League is an international association that supports breastfeeding: lllc.ca/find-group-nova-scotia.

Breastfeeding guide:

novascotia.ca/dhw/healthy-communities/documents/Breastfeeding-Basics.pdf

Nova Scotia breastfeeding policy:

novascotia.ca/dhw/healthy-development/documents/Provincial-Breastfeeding-Policy.pdf



Maternity Leave and Child Care Leave

In Canada, all mothers who work have a right to maternity leave.

Maternity leave is unpaid leave for pregnant employees and can last up to 16 weeks. Parents can take parental leave to take care of their newborns or newly-adopted children. The leave is divided into two categories: the maternity leave (16 weeks maximum) and parental leave (61 weeks) for a total of 77 weeks.

There is no length of service requirement for salaried employees to have the right to maternity and parental leave. For example, an employee could take parental leave shortly after having started their job.

Talk to your employer about it for more details.



○ Maternity and Parental Benefits

The Government of Canada offers maternity and parental employment insurance benefits to:

- people who take leave from work because they are pregnant or recently gave birth
- parents who take leave from work to care for their newborn or newly adopted child

Maternity benefits are only offered to the person who is taking leave from work because they are pregnant or recently gave birth. They cannot be shared between parents. You can receive these benefits for a

maximum of 15 weeks.

Maternity benefits can be followed by parental benefits. You can apply for both at the same time.

Employment Insurance parental benefits are paid to parents who are taking care of newborns or newly-adopted children. You can choose from two options: standard parental benefits (up to 40 weeks) OR extended parental benefits (up to 69 weeks). Your choice determines the number of weeks and weekly amount of benefits you receive.

If you share your benefits, each parent must choose the same option and submit their own application. Parents must receive their weeks of benefits at the same time or one after the other.

To find out if you meet the requirements to receive maternity benefits or parental benefits, visit a Service Canada Centre. Refer to ***servicecanada.gc.ca*** to find the centre closest to you or call **1-800-808-6352**.

Visit the website: ***www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/ei-maternity-parental.html***

○ Directory of French-language Services for Parents in Nova Scotia

This guide was created by the Fédération des parents acadiens de la Nouvelle-Écosse in order to improve access to early childhood health programs in the province.

It will help you find resources as well as early childhood centres, schools and resources, and family service centres in Nova Scotia, listed by region.

View or download the directory:

fpape.org/r/%C3%A9pertoire-services-de-la-petite-enfance

CAPENÉ

The CAPENÉ is a centre of excellence for education and early childhood development for Acadian and francophone communities. The CAPENÉ offers early childhood development programs, training, services and many resources. There are local centres (Les Pirouettes) in most Acadian and francophone communities.

Visit their website: capene.ca

Toll free: **1-866-271-5682**

Adoption

For various individual reasons that are unique to each person, adopting a child can be a solution for becoming a parent. For more information on this process, the steps to take and people to contact, refer to the resources from the Government of Nova Scotia.

Consult the "Directory of Services for Adoptive Parents" at novascotia.ca/coms/families/adoption/DirectoryofServices.html

Information:

novascotia.ca/coms/families/adoption/index.html

Nova Scotia Provincial Adoption Line: **1-866-259-7780**

IMMUNIZATION AND VACCINES

Vaccination is one of the best ways to protect yourself and your children against serious infectious diseases.

In Nova Scotia, you have access to free vaccines paid for by the government, based on the routine immunization schedule.

Public health nurses provide routine immunizations in immunization clinics and through school programs.



Children, Youth and Adult Immunization Program

The vaccines included in this program are offered free of charge. Children, youth and adults whose health is at high risk could require extra doses and be eligible for additional vaccines. For more information, speak to a health care professional or the Public Health office in your region.

Children's Vaccines

AGE	VACCINE
2 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• DTaP-IPV-Hib (diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, polio and Haemophilus influenzae type b vaccine)• RV (rotavirus)• Pneumo Conj. (pneumococcal conjugate)
4 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• DTaP-IPV-Hib• RV• Pneumo Conj.
6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Influenza• DTaP-IPV-Hib• RV
12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pneumo Conj.• MMRV (measles, mumps, rubella and varicella vaccine)
18 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• DTaP-IPV-Hib• MMRV
4 to 6 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tdap-IPV (tetanus, diphtheria, whooping cough, and polio vaccine)

School Vaccine Program

Nova Scotia's immunization schedule recommends that students receive these vaccines as part of their school vaccination program (see the list of vaccines and schedule below). These vaccines are offered because the diseases they prevent can be serious.

For more information, refer to the "School Immunization Program – Information for Parents/Guardians" booklet, available online at:

www.nshealth.ca/sites/nshealth.ca/files/patientinformation/13131.pdf

GRADE	VACCINE
Grade 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HPV (human papillomavirus)• Hepatitis B• Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis)• Meningococcal Quadrivalent (groups A, C, Y and W 135 strains of meningococcus)



Adult Vaccines

ALL ADULTS	ADULTS 65 AND OVER
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Influenza*• Td** (tetanus and diphtheria)• Tdap*** (tetanus, diphtheria and acellular pertussis)• MMR (measles, mumps and rubella)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High-dose Influenza*• Pneumococcal polysaccharide

* Every flu season

** Every 10 years

*** Should be offered with every pregnancy, regardless of age

International Travel Clinic

The International Travel Clinic offers consultations and vaccines to people travelling outside of Canada. Based on several factors, including age, vaccine status, pre-existing medical conditions, destination and local conditions, additional vaccines may be recommended.

Travel clinics are not funded by the Government of Nova Scotia. Refer to the International Travel Clinic's complete price list.

For more information about the International Travel Clinic:

902-481-5900 or travelclinic@nshealth.ca

*** TIP: Before travelling internationally, find out which vaccines are required for the country you are going to at the International Travel Clinic (902-481-5900 or travelclinic@nshealth.ca).**



COVID-19 Vaccine

The vaccine allows your body to protect itself (thanks to antibodies) to help prevent you from getting sick if you are exposed to the COVID-19 virus.

Vaccines have been protecting people around the world against deadly infectious diseases, such as measles, tetanus and polio for many years.

The COVID-19 vaccine is the most effective way to protect yourself against this disease and allow you to resume a normal life. It is an important way to reduce the spread of the virus in families and elsewhere, in addition to wearing masks, washing your hands and staying at least two metres away from others.

The COVID-19 vaccine will help protect you against COVID-19 and you must receive the recommended number of doses. These vaccines have been studied extensively in diverse populations and their safety and effectiveness has been proven.

If you would like to know more about COVID-19 tests, visitor restrictions, exposure notices and additional resources, go to nshealth.ca/coronavirus.

Please refer to the following website to access information about COVID-19 in multiple languages:

www.womenscollegetehospital.ca/covid-19-information/covid-19-vaccine-multi-language-information

SEXUAL HEALTH AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

○ Sexual Consent

In Canada, the legal age for consenting to sexual activity is 16, but there are exceptions for youth who have voluntary and consenting sexual relationships with each other.

Regardless of age, consent is always required. Giving your consent means accepting to take part in a sexual activity. It's simple: until the people involved have not clearly given their consent in words, behaviours or both, there is no consent. Each partner must ensure that they obtain the other's consent.

Each new sexual behaviour must be consented to: kissing the person or accepting being touched is not a pass for other forms of intimate or sexual contact. The person can accept, refuse or change their mind at any time. They can withdraw consent at any time during intercourse. They have the right to change their mind, stop midway and say no. A "yes" at the start can become a "no" later. Consent applies in all situations: with couples, one-night stands, etc.

If you are a victim of a crime or your spouse or a member of your family is a victim, the provincial Victim Services Program, which has four regional offices, can provide you with information, support and assistance as the case makes its way through the criminal justice system.

Information: Justice Canada at canada.justice.gc.ca



○ 2SLGBTQ+

2SLGBTQ+ is an acronym that means two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer and questioning. The + sign refers to other identities and ensures that no one is excluded from the group.

In Nova Scotia, like elsewhere in Canada, laws protect the 2SLGBTQ+ community against discrimination based on their sex, sexual orientation, identity and gender expression. Here are the most important ones:

- *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*
- *Canadian Human Rights Act*
- *Nova Scotia Human Rights Act*

Ressources :

- **Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)**
1 888 530-6777
1 888 530-6777, ext. 574 (Halifax)
902-862-4954 (Sydney)
902-895-0931 (Truro)
Website: pflagcanada.ca
- **Egale Canada**
Website: egale.ca
- **The Youth Project**
Provincial program that aims to make Nova Scotia a safer and more fulfilling place for the LGBTQ+ community.
902-429-5429
Website: youthproject.ns.ca
- **Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project**
Advocacy group for the LGBTQ+ community in Nova Scotia.
Website: nsrap.ca
- **Sexual Health Nova Scotia at 902-543-6900**
- **Halifax prideHealth: 902-220-0643**

Sexual Health

For any questions relating to sexual health (contraception, pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, etc.), call **811**. The nursing staff will answer your questions and direct you to the appropriate services, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is a confidential and free service.

 **TIP: If you have questions about sexual health, call 811.**

Sexually Transmitted Infections

Sexually transmitted infections and the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) are infections that can be transmitted during unprotected sexual relations with an infected person, with or without penetration.

Check whether your vaccinations for hepatitis and the human papilloma virus are up to date and use condoms and dental dams – they are all good ways of protecting yourself and your partner.

Since many sexually transmitted infections do not have any clear symptoms, at least in the early stages, it is important to take precautions in order to protect yourself and your partner and have regular tests.

The Nova Scotia Cervical Cancer Prevention program is free. Testing for cervical cancer by means of a Pap test is recommended every three years for women 25 to 70 who have had sexual relations with a male or female partner.

Early detection can also help reduce or avoid health problems and reduce the spread of sexually transmitted infections between partners.

In Nova Scotia, Pap tests are conducted by a specially-trained member of the health care team. You can book an appointment to have a Pap test with your doctor.

Resources:

- Your family doctor
- **811** to speak to a registered nurse, 24 hours a day
- A sexual health centre – shns.ca

- Well Woman Clinics – nshealth.ca/content/well-woman-clinics
- AIDS Coalition– Toll free **1-800-566-2437**.

○ Anonymous HIV Testing

Nova Scotia public health nurses offer free, anonymous HIV testing to Nova Scotians. They refer people with HIV towards the appropriate resources for treatment.

Anonymous tests mean that you will not provide your name or any identifying information to the person conducting the blood test. In the event of a positive test result, some statistical information will be provided to Public Health for reporting purposes. Your name will never be linked to the test results, and no information will be recorded on your medical file.

To get an anonymous HIV test, call the information line for your area:

Halifax prideHealth
902-220-0643

Halifax Sexual
Health Centre
902-455-9656

Truro Northern AIDS
Connection Society
1-866-940-2437

AIDS Coalition of
Cape Breton
1-877-597-9255

Emergency Contraception

Emergency contraception means contraception methods that can be used to prevent a pregnancy after sexual intercourse. It is recommended to use these methods within five days following intercourse, but the earlier they are used, the more effective they are. In Canada, there are two methods of emergency contraception:

Oral Emergency Contraception

Two types of oral emergency contraception or the “morning-after pill” are available. LNG-EC pills (or “Plan B”) are offered without a prescription in pharmacies in Nova Scotia. These pills are most effective if taken within 24 hours after unprotected intercourse.



UPA-EC (“Ella”) pills can only be obtained with a prescription. They are taken as a single dose of one pill within 120 hours (5 days) after unprotected sexual intercourse.

Intrauterine Device

An intrauterine device (IUD) made of copper, which is inserted by a doctor up to seven days after unprotected sexual intercourse is the most effective emergency contraception method. Even though it is only available with a prescription, it ensures long-term protection against pregnancy.

For more information, speak to a health care professional, call **811** or visit the Sex & U website (Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada)

www.sexandu.ca

Home Pregnancy Test

If you think you might be pregnant, it is important to find out as quickly as possible. The quickest way to know is to do a home pregnancy test, available without a prescription. Use a test with simple instructions and follow them carefully. If the result is positive, make an appointment with your doctor or at an obstetrics clinic so a health care professional can confirm the result.



○ Unplanned Pregnancies

Every situation is unique and your experience will not be the same as someone else's. Your personal values, beliefs and where you are in your life will have an impact on your choice as to whether you would like to continue with the pregnancy or not. The most important thing to remember is that the decision is up to you. It is a good idea to speak to a health care professional (family doctor or pharmacist) at a hospital or walk-in clinic as soon as possible after having confirmed that you are pregnant, in order to understand the different options available to you.

○ Voluntary Termination of Pregnancy

Abortion means terminating a pregnancy in its early stages. In some cases, a woman's pregnancy terminates itself on its own. This is known as a miscarriage or a spontaneous abortion. In other cases, the woman chooses to terminate her pregnancy by taking medications (medical abortion) or having a procedure (surgical abortion). These abortions are conducted by health care professionals at the hospital, doctor's office or at a health care centre.

Websites:

- 811.novascotia.ca/health_topics/ending-a-pregnancy/
- nshealth.ca/abortion

Nova Scotia Women's Choice Clinic
Tel.: **1-833-352-0719**

○ Giving a Child up for Adoption

The decision to carry a pregnancy to term to then give the child up for adoption is a choice based on personal reasons and values. It is important to learn as much as you can about the process before making this decision.

Refer to the Directory of Services for Adoptive Parents website at novascotia.ca/coms/families/adoption/DirectoryofServices.html

Information:

novascotia.ca/coms/families/adoption/index.html

Nova Scotia Provincial Adoption Line: **1-866-259-7780**

○ Nova Scotia Breast Screening Program

All women 40 and over with no symptoms with a health card can benefit from the mammogram information and testing program. You do not need to be referred by a health care professional, but you will be asked to provide their contact information so they can receive the results from your exam.

You can get more information and make an appointment by calling **902-473-3960** in the Halifax area or **1-800-565-0548** in the rest of the province. You must have your health card on hand when you call. A file will be created for you and you will receive instructions on how to get to the exam at one of the many permanent centres or at a mobile clinic close to you.



VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is illegal in Canada, just like violence between two strangers is.

Domestic violence is defined as any form of abuse or neglect inflicted on a child or adult by a member of the family or by someone they have an intimate relationship with. A person may be subjected to more than one form of violence or abuse, including:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Psychological abuse

Be aware that the law encourages you not to tolerate and to report these situations. If someone (regardless of their gender or sex) is sexually assaulted by a member of their family, they should call **911** to ask for help from the police. They will be protected and will be directed towards the appropriate resources, in collaboration with social services.

Legal Protection

You will not lose any of your rights if you leave your marital home to get away from abuse. On the contrary, the law protects you, as well as your children. Someone with permanent resident status cannot be deprived of this status nor be forced to leave Canada for leaving a relationships where they were subjected to violence.

Support Services for Female Victims of Violence

There are a range of resources and support services in Nova Scotia for women who are victims of violence, including helplines, transition houses, second-stage housing or the Domestic Violence Outreach program.

If you need help, you can call the toll-free Transition House Association of Nova Scotia line, 24 hours a day: **1-855-225-0220**, or visit this website:
nsdomesticviolence.ca/get-help

Information sheet for children who have witnessed violence:
novascotia.ca/just/victim_services/_docs/CIC%20for%20Children-DV.pdf

○ Sexual Assault

*** TIP: If you were a victim of sexual assault and you are in immediate danger or have serious injuries, call 911.**

If you are safe, but require medical care, go to the closest hospital Emergency Department. Even if a victim does not wish to report the sexual assault, it is very important to see a health care professional as quickly as possible after the incident. This will allow you to be tested for sexually-transmitted diseases and infections, including HIV/AIDS and receive medical treatments. If you would like to report the assault to the police, do not wash yourself, do not take a bath and do not change your clothing before seeing the medical staff. It is important to preserve all evidence that may remain on your body or clothing.

WELCOME TO NOVA SCOTIA!



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