



December 3, 2024

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Via email: admin@akblg.ca

Keith Page
President
Association of Kootenay and Boundary Local Governments
816 Sproat Dr
Nelson BC V1L 7B7

Dear Keith Page and Association members:

Thank you to you and your delegation for meeting with the Minister and me at the Union of British Columbia Municipalities Convention in September. It was a pleasure to hear from you.

The issues your delegation brought forward were of great interest to me. Topics raised during the meeting included reasonable access to insured medical services out of province for those close to the BC-Alberta border. Additionally, you raised the importance of transportation for patients in your region to Kelowna for medical services.

As you may know, the Travel Assistance Program (TAP) helps alleviate some of the transportation costs for eligible British Columbia residents who must travel within the province for non-emergency medical specialist services not available in their own community upon referral by a Family Physician or Nurse Practitioner. TAP is a corporate partnership between the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) and private transportation carriers (air, rail, bus and ferry service) who agree to waive or discount their regular fees.

Patients must obtain approval prior to travel and present a completed TAP application form to the transportation carrier at the time of travel. TAP does *not* provide direct financial assistance to patients for travel costs or make travel arrangements for patients. Meals, accommodation, mileage, fuel and local transportation expenses are *not* included in TAP and are the responsibility of the patient. *There is no reimbursement for travel already taken.* Detailed information about TAP, including eligibility, how to apply and a complete list of our travel partners is available by visiting the TAP BC website at <https://www.gov.bc.ca/travelassistanceprogram>.

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Aside from TAP, there are a number of other supports available for medical travel in BC. The Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction offers medical transportation supplements, which are provided to some recipients of income assistance and disability assistance who are eligible for general health supplements or are facing a life-threatening health need. They are intended to meet extraordinary transportation costs associated with essential medical treatment. Support includes assistance with transportation, food or support costs, accommodation, and companion costs (if applicable). Clients must show that they have explored all other avenues of assistance including TAP and Health Connections. Further information can be found at the following site: <https://www.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/policies-for-government/bcea-policy-and-procedure-manual/health-supplements-and-programs/medical-transportation>.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development's At Home Program provides medical benefits for children with disabilities. Travel and accommodation assistance is available when the child must travel in excess of 80 km to access specialized medical care related to their disability: primarily at BC Children's Hospital and Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children. Further information can be found here: <https://www.bcdisability.com/at-home-program>

In addition to the above provincial programs, there are some charities operating in BC which offer assistance for medical travel.


The Canadian Cancer Society runs two programs to help cancer patients with medical travel. Wheels of Hope connects people who need transportation to cancer treatments with volunteer drivers. In BC, this program is available in the interior, Prince George and Vancouver Island. Additionally, the Travel Treatment Fund offers short-term financial assistance to cover some costs of travelling to cancer treatments. This includes expenses like fuel and taxi or public transit fares. It is available to people with a low income who are currently receiving cancer treatment. Further information about both programs can be found here: <https://cancer.ca/en/living-with-cancer/how-we-can-help/transportation>.

Hope Air is a national charity providing free flights to people required to travel for medical care who cannot afford the cost. Further information can be found here: <https://hopeair.ca/>. A similar service is offered by Angel Flight, which provides free air transportation to ambulatory cancer patients requiring travel to treatment at cancer clinics and hospitals in Vancouver, Victoria and other cancer centres within their approved areas of operation. Further information can be found at <https://www.angelflight.ca>.

Thank you for your leadership. I appreciate these important opportunities to exchange ideas and share information.

Thank you again for taking the time to meet with me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "M. Armitage", followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Mark Armitage
Associate Deputy Minister