



The following info sheet provides a summary about major topics for newcomer refugees with disabilities who recently arrived in Canada and are exploring driving, driver assessment programs, vehicle modifications, and accessible parking permits. In addition to public transit options and accessibility features including special rates for persons with disabilities in B.C. The info sheet also provides a settlement checklist/handout to help newcomer refugees with disabilities and their settlement workers with disability/settlement related supports during their first year in B.C.

DRIVING A VEHICLE

Refugees with disabilities can drive a vehicle with appropriate adaptive equipment in B.C. but may need to go through driver rehabilitation assessment to get the necessary equipment and ensure they are physically capable of driving safely.

Access to Driver rehabilitation assessments and lessons:

- **GF Strong Rehabilitation Centre**¹ (Vancouver with a physician referral)
- **Access Driver Rehab**²
- **Community Therapists**³ (Victoria, Metro Vancouver, Kelowna)
- **Meridian Rehabilitation Consulting**⁴ (Okanagan)

VEHICLE MODIFICATIONS

Refugees with disabilities who need an accessible vehicle generally have to pay the cost of the modifications and installation themselves.

Note: The only possible exception is if a personal vehicle is required to help a person get (with a confirmed job offer) or maintain employment. In that case, individuals may be able to get partial funding through the **WorkBC Assistive Technology Services** program, provided by the Neil Squire Society.

Access is provided through:

- **WorkBC Assistive Technology Services Centre**⁵
- **List of vehicle medication companies**⁶

ACCESSIBLE PARKING SPACES

Accessible parking spaces are usually located near building entrances.

These spaces are:

- Wider
- Have a level pathway to the building
- Signed with the International Symbol of Accessibility

Refugees with Disabilities who need these spaces (whether driver, owner, or passenger) need to get a plastic sign called a placard or permit that indicates need of an accessible parking space. These permits are available through **SPARC BC**.⁷ **A doctor's note is required.**

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Most communities in B.C. have some form of public transit. In the Lower Mainland, **Translink**⁸ runs the service. This service encompasses buses, SkyTrain, and Seabus, all of which are accessible. In the rest of B.C., the service is run by **BC Transit**⁹ together with regional governments, offering municipal bus and **HandyDart**¹⁰ service.

Individuals with disabilities who are unable to use conventional transit like buses and trains which are accessible, **HandyDart** offers:

- Shared service
- Door-to-door accessible service in many B.C. communities using small buses
- Buses with wheelchair lift
- 2-4 wheelchair spaces
- An application is required, and a **doctor's note** may be required to access this service.

Refugees with disabilities who qualify for HandyDart service may be eligible for TaxiSavers, which provides discounted rates in some communities for taxi use when HandyDart is not available.

Refugees with disabilities who receive **Disability assistance** in B.C. can either receive:

- A bus pass worth \$52 per month or
- The cash to buy the bus pass on their own or to spend on vehicle or other transportation expenses.

More info: Call 1-866-866-0800 to opt into the program.

BC FERRIES

B.C. operates several public ferry routes between the mainland of British Columbia, Vancouver Island, the Sunshine Coast, and several other islands.

BC Ferries:

- Are accessible to varying degrees depending on the ship used for that route.
- When individuals with disabilities buy their ticket, they must indicate their special needs to the ferry staff and that they need elevator access to get to the passenger levels of the ferry.
- B.C. residents with disabilities may qualify for a **discount**¹¹ on the passenger (not the vehicle) portion of their fare.
- If individuals with disabilities are traveling without a vehicle and need assistance to get to the ferry from the terminal, they can request it wherever they purchase a ticket but leave at least 30 minutes extra time for this assistance.

AIR TRAVEL

Airlines follow federal rules for accessibility. Small passenger planes may not be accessible. Access to most passenger aircrafts are via a Washington or aisle chair, a narrow chair used to move passengers with disabilities down the aisle of the aircraft. For more on air travel for individuals with disabilities, check out:

Accessible Travel Guide and resources.¹²

Air Canada and WestJet both have **“One Person One Fare” policies**¹³ so that a required attendant can travel without charge (some fees and taxes are still charged). You can contact each airline for the specifics of their policy and how to book.

TRAIN TRAVEL

Via Rail¹⁴ is the long-distance train service in B.C. and across Canada. Trains have at least one washroom designated as accessible.

- Trains typically have one or two places where a wheelchair can be tied down so passengers with disabilities can ride in it.
- Passengers with disabilities can transfer to a seat and have their wheelchair stowed in the luggage compartment.
- Trains with sleeping cars have at least one accessible compartment per train.
- Main stations have lifts to get wheelchair users onto the trains.
- Individuals with disabilities travel at regular prices, but attendants travel at no charge.
- Some trains have narrow doors or very minimal on-board accessibility, especially on the Prince Rupert-Jasper route.

HEALTH CONNECTIONS TRAVEL ASSISTANT PROGRAM

Each health authority in B.C. has a Travel Assistance Program available for non-emergency medical appointments outside of the person's home community. Individuals accessing the service must be a B.C. Resident and be enrolled in the Medical Services Plan (MSP). For more information, visit **Health Connections**.¹⁵

Wheelchair users in communities such as Prince George, Prince Rupert, Terrace, Fort St. John, Dawson Cree, Smithers, etc. served by Northern Health can ride the **Northern Health Connections bus**,¹⁶ even if they are not traveling for medical appointments. This service has a lift, accessible washroom and space for 2-4 passengers using wheelchairs.

SETTLEMENT/DISABILITY SUPPORTS AND SERVICES

Newcomers Refugees with Disabilities should apply to the following services during their first year in B.C.



Apply for BCID Card¹⁷

It's a reliable piece of government photo ID with the same security features as a B.C. driver's license.



Enroll in BC's Medical Services Plan¹⁸

In B.C., public health insurance is called the Medical Services Plan (MSP). It covers the cost of medically necessary insured doctor services.



Register for BC Fair Pharmacare¹⁹

This service helps eligible B.C. residents with the cost of some prescription drugs and medical supplies.



Find a family physician²⁰

Family doctors identify and treat diseases and injuries in their own primary care clinic, community health center, nursing home, or hospital. They also look for health risks, address health prevention (immunizations, treatments, etc.) and make referrals to specialist doctors. Family doctors or general practitioners (GPs) offer primary care covered by the provincial government and are the gatekeeper for access to specialized care and diagnostic testing.



Apply for the Federal Disability Tax Credit²¹

DTC helps reduce the income tax that individuals with physical or mental impairments, or their supporting family members, may have to pay. It aims to offset some of the costs related to the impairment.



Apply for Persons with Disabilities (PWD) benefits²² (if eligible):

PWD is a category of income assistance for individuals with disabilities provided by the B.C. Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction.



Apply for Social Insurance Number (SIN)²³

To work in Canada or access government programs and benefits such as WorkBC, you need a 9-digit number known as a Social Insurance Number (SIN).



Apply for HandyDART²⁴

An accessible custom transit service offering door-to-door, shared-ride service for individuals who are unable to use conventional public transit (bus or train) without assistance.



Find a Wheelchair Repair Provider²⁵



Apply for Accessible Housing²⁶

Finding wheelchair accessible and affordable housing in B.C. is very difficult. SCI B.C. has an **Accessible Housing**²⁷ listing as well as a Housing list of vacancies which emails participants when an accessible housing opportunity becomes available. Other Resources: **Metro Vancouver Housing**²⁸ and **Right Fit Project**²⁹

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27. sci-bc.ca/marketplace/

28. metrovancouver.org/services/housing/Pages/default.aspx

29. therightfitbc.org/