

Guide to Services in BC for Clients with Precarious Status

As of July 14, 2026



Table of Contents

Introduction	03
Available Supports	04
Legal Resources	04
Identification	05
WorkBC	06
Employment Standards and Protections	06
Government Financial Assistance	08
Banking	13
Food	13
Housing	15
Healthcare	16
Education	18
Recreational, Cultural, and Youth Services	20

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Introduction

This resource provides information for providers serving clients with precarious immigration status and lapsed status (“out of status”). In this guide, out of status individuals are defined as those without current legal status in Canada. Precarious status is used as an umbrella term that includes out of status individuals and other examples of precarity which include, but are not limited to, individuals with lapsing temporary resident status (as a refugee claimant, international student, or temporary foreign worker) as well as those with ineligible refugee claims who are awaiting a CBSA interview, awaiting a Pre-Removal Risk Assessment decision, or who are citizens from moratoria countries. Information about deferrals, including a list of moratorium countries, can be found at:

<https://www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/security-securite/rem-ren-eng.html#s04>.

Public policy changes in Canada have made it more challenging individuals to achieve permanence in Canada. These changes include the passing of the Strengthening Canada’s Immigration System and Borders Act (the Act) in March 2026. Under the Act, some people who have submitted refugee claims are being directed to a Pre-Removal Risk Assessment (PRRA) process instead of being referred to the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB). For the most current policies related to refugee claim eligibility, refer to the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) webpage on Refugee protection in Canada at:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/protection.html>.

Eligibility for many programs and services can depend on holding a valid immigration status in Canada. This resource collects available supports, outlines where individuals with precarious status lose access to key programs or services that they may previously have been able to access, and, where possible, offers alternatives for settlement practitioners to do referral or service linkage. Because of the recency of the Act, there are some areas where it is not yet fully clear how access to services will be impacted for those awaiting the PRRA process. In such cases, this ambiguity will be noted.

This resource does not offer legal advice. The Legal Aid section provides information about what legal aid supports are available to those with precarious status.

Available Supports

Many programs and services open to newcomers are status-dependent and may not be available to individuals with precarious status. Provincially funded newcomer services through the BC Newcomer Services Program (BCNSP) and BC Safe Haven program require certain immigration statuses, or for clients to be at a particular stage in the process of claiming protection in Canada, to be eligible for the full range of program services. See your latest Program Manual for the latest eligibility requirements. If individuals with precarious status are not eligible for services offered by your organization, service providers may still benefit from knowing where they can connect these vulnerable clients with supports available to them.

Often, one of the first concerns of those who have lost immigration status is the restoration of their status. Service providers in BC cannot offer immigration advice to clients in their role as federally or provincially funded staff; however, they can provide information about different programs and policies as appropriate. Clients seeking legal advice should be directed to the supports listed in the Legal Aid section of this booklet. Staff unsure of the limits of their role should review AMSSA's webinar on immigration information versus immigration advice at: <https://www.amssa.org/resource/irpa-section-91-understanding-immigration-information-versus-immigration-advice/>. This training is mandatory for all BCNSP and BC Safe Haven service providers who work directly with clients.

Legal Resources

Individuals with precarious status can access a range of legal aid supports depending on specific eligibility criteria, such as immigration status, legal aid needs, and income

Legal Aid BC provides lawyers for those facing an immigration proceeding that may result in removal in Canada and those wishing to claim refugee status. Their scope includes helping with PRRA applications. More information is available at: <https://legalaid.bc.ca/services/immigration-problems>. Prospective clients facing a PRRA are encouraged to call the Legal Aid BC immigration line (interpreters are available): 604-601-6076 (Greater Vancouver), or 1-888-601-6076 (elsewhere in BC). Clients are accepted based on financial eligibility and the case having a reasonable chance of success.

Justice Education Society has legal navigators who can answer some questions through the Ask JES chat at: <https://legalhelpbc.ca/> or by call/text at 1-855-875-8867.

Amici Curiae Friends of Court offers virtual or in-person appointments, generally one hour long, to assist with filling out legal forms. They cannot represent a client in court. More information can be found at: <https://www.legalformsbc.ca/services/legal-forms-workshop>.

The Law Students' Legal Advice Program holds free legal advice drop-in clinics in Vancouver run by UBC law students, supervised by a lawyer. They cannot support those who qualify for Legal Aid BC, so clients should first try to access Legal Aid. More information is available at: <https://www.lslap.bc.ca/>

The Immigration and Refugee Legal Clinic offers free legal advice and representation to people with temporary or no immigration status who do not qualify for traditional legal aid. Individuals seeking to regularize their status may find support through this program. Information and the intake form are available at: <https://www.irlc.ca/>.

Migrant Worker's Centre provides free legal aid for out of status migrant workers through their staff lawyers and their Saturday drop-in clinics. They can support with immigration matters, workplace injuries, judicial reviews of immigration processes, and some work permit applications. Information is available at their website: <https://mwcbc.ca/>.

Although based in Ontario and unable to provide direct aid to BC residents, there are many informational resources available through FCJ Refugee Centre at: <https://www.fcjrefugeecentre.org/immigration-and-refugee-protection/>.

Identification

- To renew a BC ID or get a new ID, clients will need valid temporary immigration documentation such as a work permit and two forms of ID
- For clients with a work permit, the kind of ID they receive may depend on how long their work permit is valid

To get a driver's license or BC services card through ICBC, an individual must present a primary and secondary form of ID. The primary ID must be issued in Canada, and can include valid temporary immigration documentation, such as a work or study permit or a Refugee Protection Identity Document (RPID). If using a work permit as identification, the permit must be valid for at least six months for the client to receive a card by mail. That card is valid for two years if this is an initial application for a license and five years if it is a renewal. If the work permit is good for less than six months, they will be issued a paper card at the ICBC office, which is valid for 90 days. If an individual had previously shown a work or study permit or RPID on a prior visit to ICBC, they must show it again if renewing or replacing their BCID or license, even if it is expired. A PRRA applicant with a work permit can show their work permit as a form of ID.

Secondary ID can be issued by a foreign government. It can include foreign passports, Canadian bank cards, or many other forms of identification. A full list of primary and secondary ID types accepted at ICBC is available at: <https://www.icbc.com/driver-licensing/visit-dl-office/Accepted-ID>.

It is important to renew identification documents before they lapse. Individuals with lapsed status will likely be unable to get new ID, but their BC identification does not automatically expire with their immigration status. A foreign passport will meet some ID requirements, but they may encounter challenges in any situation that requires Canadian or British Columbian ID, such as when driving.

WorkBC

- Any individual, regardless of immigration status, can access the self-serve services at WorkBC
- Individuals on PRRA or awaiting a decision can access WorkBC case-managed services

The self-serve services at WorkBC locations are open to anyone, including PRRA applicants and out of status individuals. WorkBC self-serve services include computer workstations, internet, telephones, photocopy and scanning equipment and staff support to help individuals access the resources available in the self-serve area. You can find more information about WorkBC Self-Serve Services at: <https://www.workbc.ca/discover-employment-services/workbc-centres/self-serve-services>.

As of the time of this resource guide, individuals on PRRA or awaiting a decision can access case-managed WorkBC services as long as they are authorized to work and meet the basic requirements: if their claim is under IRB review, PRRA, or appeal; they provide the required documentation; and they have a valid work permit.

Employment Standards and Protections

- Those who are out of status cannot legally work in Canada
- All workers in BC, including those with precarious status who cannot legally work in Canada, are entitled to workplace protections and can file claims through WorkSafeBC for workplace injury or illness
- Individuals with precarious status can submit complaints about violations under the Employment Standards Act or the Foreign Worker Protection Act

WorkSafeBC

All workers in BC, including those with precarious status, can submit claims for illness or injury sustained at work through WorkSafeBC, which may include:

- Health care benefits – Coverage of the cost of the health care services and supplies that are considered reasonably necessary to treat injuries. This may include medical treatments, hospitalization, medical supplies, rehabilitation, and medications
- Wage-loss benefits for lost work hours – Compensation for workers who lose pay due to a work-related injury or illness (usually about 90% of calculated net earnings)
- Vocational rehabilitation – Collaborative process to help workers transition back to a job or to find other suitable employment if an injury or occupational disease impacts their ability to return to a previous job

These benefits are only applicable to verified injury or illness sustained at work. Information about filing a WorkSafeBC claim is available at:

www.worksafebc.com/en/claims. Interpretation and translation services are available for those submitting WorkSafeBC claims and the WorkSafeBC website is available in Chinese (Simplified and Traditional), French, Korean, Punjabi, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

If individuals with precarious status encounter challenges in proving their employment and wages to WorkSafeBC due to a lack records or pay slips, there is a process for demonstrating income that a WorkSafeBC claims officer can support with.

Because the claim process involves WorkSafeBC interacting with the employer, there may be fears that filing a claim may open the worker up to employer retaliation, including being reported to CBSA. Retaliation is legally forbidden, and if employers or unions penalize workers for raising a health and safety concern, the worker can submit a prohibited action complaint through WorkSafeBC:

www.worksafebc.com/prohibitedaction. The Workers' Advisers Office (WAO) provides advice on prohibited action complaints free of charge and more information can be found at:

www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/employment-standards-advice/personal-injury-and-workplace-safety.

It is important to ensure out of status workers are aware of the risks and benefits of filing a WorkBC claim and are empowered with information to make the decision that is best for them. Those who previously held a work permit may find support in completing a claim through such agencies as Migrant Workers Centre at mwcbc.ca/https://mwcbc.ca/ or Dignidad Migrante at www.dignidadmigrantesociety.org/en/site.

Employment Standards Act

All individuals working in BC, including those with precarious status, are covered by the Employment Standards Act, which guarantees standards for payment, compensation, and working conditions in most workplaces, such as being paid minimum wage, working standard work hours, and sick leave. Visit

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/employment-standards-advice/employment-standards> for topical navigation and answers to common questions.

If an employer violates employment standards, a complaint can be filed with the Employment Standards Branch. Workers can file confidential or anonymous complaints. Settlement workers can help clients navigate the complaints process as it may be challenging for newcomers. To find out more about when to file a complaint and how to do so, visit: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/employment-standards-advice/employment-standards/complaint-process>.

Foreign nationals working in BC are also covered under the Temporary Foreign Worker Protection Act. Violations of the TFWPA can be submitted as a complaint to the Employment Standards Branch. For more information, visit: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/employment-standards-advice/employment-standards/hiring/hire-temporary-foreign-workers/complaint-process-tfw>.

Government Financial Assistance

Employment Insurance (EI)

- Workers without legal work authorization cannot access EI and applying poses risks
- Individuals who still have a valid work permit (including those referred to PRRA) are eligible for EI provided they meet additional criteria
- Individuals with a valid work permit who have precarious status (e.g., migrant workers, individuals on maintained status) may be incorrectly denied EI benefits and may choose to seek a reconsideration or appeal

Regular Benefits

Employment Insurance (EI) benefits offer temporary support to unemployed workers. Applicants who still have a valid work permit may be eligible for EI benefits, including workers on “maintained status” who have applied for a work permit extension before the expiry date of their previous permit and are awaiting a decision¹. This means that EI can be accessed by ineligible claimants who are referred to the Pre-Removal Risk Assessment Process (PRRA) if they have an active work permit or are on maintained status. Out of status individuals are typically unable to access EI. For those without a valid work permit, it may be risky to apply for EI and they would likely not qualify.

¹ There is also a case in which EI has been given to someone who briefly had a lapse in status because the applicant was able to prove that circumstances beyond their control prevented the immediate renewal of their work permit.

Other EI eligibility criteria that can be more difficult to meet for individuals with precarious status include providing proof in the form of a Record of Employment (ROE) and the requirement to remain in Canada to receive benefits. EI will help workers obtain an ROE, but many workers do not know this and are discouraged from applying for EI if their employer refuses to supply one.

There are cases where individuals with a valid work permit who have precarious status have been denied EI benefits because Service Canada employees have misunderstood how their own policies apply to temporary residents. Individuals with legal work authorization who have been denied EI have the option to request a reconsideration at <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/ei-reconsideration.html> or submit an appeal at <https://caae-eiboa.service.canada.ca/en/index.shtml>.

Special Benefits

Special EI benefits include sickness benefits, maternity and parental benefits, and caregiving benefits. Accessing special benefits requires a valid SIN, which may pose barriers for some with precarious status, depending on what stage they are at in the immigration process. Note that SINs for temporary residents expire when the work or study permit expires: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/sin/temporary-residents.html>

Similar to regular benefits, out of status individuals are unable to access special EI benefits.

BC Income Assistance, Disability Assistance, or Hardship Assistance

- Out of status individuals cannot access BC income assistance, disability assistance, or hardship assistance
- PRRA applicants are eligible for BC income assistance, though those in the waiting period between being deemed ineligible for referral to the IRB and being invited to complete a PRRA will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis

Access to BC Income Assistance, Disability, or Hardship Assistance is available if at least one applicant or recipient in the family unit is “ordinarily resident” in British Columbia (BC) and is:

- A refugee claimant/person applying for protection, which includes PRRA applicants
- Under a removal order that has been stayed or cannot be executed (status needs to be verified through the Financial and Administrative Services Branch (FASB))
- Person in Canada under temporary resident visa through emergency authorization for humanitarian reasons related to armed conflict

The province's definition of "refugee claimant/person applying for protection" is broad enough to include various stages of submitting a refugee claim, including those who are awaiting their eligibility review with CBSA or IRCC; those who are appealing a negative decision from the IRB; and those eligible for a Pre-Removal Risk Assessment (PRRA) or who are applying for judicial review by the Federal Court of Canada. Applicants for income assistance under these criteria need to provide immigration document IMM1442 or an Acknowledgement of Claim and Notice to Return for Interview (AOC) form that specifies they are in Canada under this category. Applicants who have been deemed ineligible to be referred to the IRB, but who have not yet been invited to complete the PRRA will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Such individuals may need to submit a letter from legal representation outlining their situation.

Canada Child Tax Benefit

- Out of status individuals and refugee claimants are ineligible for the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCB)
- Temporary residents who have lived in Canada throughout the previous 18 months and have a valid permit in the 19th month are eligible for the CCB
- Individuals who are personally ineligible for the CCB may access the benefit through a spouse/common-law partner who is eligible

To be eligible for the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCB), a person must be a "resident of Canada for tax purposes" and be or have a spouse/common-law partner who is one of the following:

- Canadian citizen
- Permanent resident
- Protected person
- Temporary resident
- An individual who is registered or entitled to be registered under the Indian Act.

Temporary residents are defined according to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and must have lived in Canada throughout the previous 18 months and have a valid work permit in the 19th month. Temporary residents on maintained status are still eligible for the Canada Child Tax Benefit, although proof about the maintained status may need to be provided to the CRA to prevent interruptions in CCB payments, as the CRA may automatically halt CCB payment upon the expiry of temporary permits.

Refugee claimants and individuals without status not personally eligible for the CCB, but may be able to access it if they have a spouse or common law partner who meets the criteria of having legal immigration status that fits within CCB eligibility.

Full details can be found through the CRA: <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/forms-publications/publications/t4114/canada-child-benefit.html>.

Canadian Pension Plan

- Individuals who are out of status cannot access pension benefits
- Individuals who have lost status but previously have contributed to CPP while legally working in Canada may be able to access pension benefits, including from other countries
- Canada has international social security agreements with over 50 countries that may help workers meet CPP eligibility

The following table details CPP benefits and the associated eligibility criteria. Individuals who paid into the CPP while legally working in Canada who meet the below eligibility criteria should be able to access pension benefits, even if they are out of status or are no longer residing in Canada:

Benefit	Description	Eligibility
Retirement Pension https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp.html	Taxable monthly benefit that replaces part of your income when you retire. The amount is calculated based on age, contributions, and average earnings	• Make at least one valid contribution to CPP • Be at least 60 years old
Disability Benefits https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp-disability-benefit.html	Taxable monthly payment for those unable to work because of a disability who are <u>not receiving</u> a CPP pension	• Be between 18 and 65 years old • Have a mental or physical disability that regularly stops you from doing any substantially gainful work • Have a disability that is long-term and of indefinite duration, or is likely to result in death • Have made valid contributions to CPP in 4 of the last 6 years OR contributions for at least 25 years, including 3 of the last 6 years

Benefit	Description	Eligibility
Post-Retirement Disability Benefit https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp/cpp-post-retirement-disability-benefit.html	Taxable monthly payment for individuals who become disabled after they begin to receive a CPP	· Be under the age of 65 · Have a severe and prolonged mental or physical medical condition · Have made valid contributions to CPP in 4 of the last 6 years OR contributions for at least 25 years, including 3 of the last 6 years
Survivors Pension https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp/cpp-survivor-pension.html	Monthly payment to legal spouse or common-law partner of the deceased contributor. The amount received will depend on whether you are younger or older than 65 and how much the deceased contributor has paid into CPP	· Be married to OR the common law partner of a deceased CPP contributor
Death Benefit https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp/cpp-death-benefit.html	One-time payment payable to eligible individuals on behalf of deceased CPP contributor. The base amount is \$2,500 with a possible top-up of an additional \$2,500	· Deceased must have contributed to CPP for at least a third of the calendar year in their contributory period for base CPP but no less than three calendar years OR 10 calendar years

CPP benefits can be accessed anywhere in the world and can be paid via direct deposit into bank accounts in other countries or by cheque. See www.canada.ca/en/public-services-procurement/services/payments-to-from-government/direct-deposit/foreign-bank-account.html for more information. A list of Canada's international social security agreements can be found at: www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp/cpp-international/eligibility.html.

Banking

- Out of status individuals may face challenges meeting the ID requirements to open bank accounts
- Individuals with legal status in Canada (including those impacted by PRRA) should be able to open a bank account if they have government-issued ID
- Banks may be more likely to help individuals with precarious status to open bank accounts if accompanied by someone whom the bank knows

Banks typically require pieces of government-issued photo identification or several pieces of other independent, reliable sources; some banks may only accept foreign passports alongside valid work authorization. Banks can refuse to open accounts if they believe it will be used for illegal or fraudulent purposes, if they have reasonable grounds to believe the client knowingly made false statements, or if the client does not allow them to verify the validity of identification. Some of these concerns may be relieved if individuals with precarious status are accompanied by a customer the bank knows.

Food

- Food Banks often require registration with ID and proof of address. Some require proof of income or proof of legal immigration status, although most provide services regardless of immigration status. Food banks should be contacted for their specific policy as some may also be more flexible
- Individuals with lapsed or precarious status may be more easily able to access food boxes, mutual aid, food sharing programs, and community fridges/pantries
- Individuals with lapsed or precarious status may be able to access free or low-cost meal programs in their community, although eligibility depends on the specific organization providing services
- Many communities have existing community food service directories about low and no cost food options

Food Banks

Food banks all have individual policies, so it is best to contact the local food bank to clarify eligibility criteria. Many food banks involve a registration process (either through appointment or walk-in, depending on the organization) and some type of identification and proof of address.

Some food banks require proof of income and proof of legal immigration status to access services, but many food banks provide services regardless of immigration status. Some food banks may be more flexible about ID for out of status clients and may accept non-government ID that displays proof of address, verification from other non-profits (e.g., settlement organizations) that the client lives in their community, photos/photocopies of ID, expired ID, or out-of-country ID. Several food banks have policies around protecting client data from immigration authorities, although it is important to contact local food banks directly.

Food Banks BC Directory can be used to find food bank locations in your community:

<https://www.foodbanksbc.com/find-a-food-bank>.

Food boxes, Mutual Aid, Community Gardens & Fridges

Food box programs connect the community with fresh, affordable produce at lower cost due to bulk buying and connections with farmers and often do not require any form of ID. These programs may offer subsidized boxes for food at an even lower price, so there may be opportunities for SPOs to refer their clients.

Searching for food sharing and mutual aid programs can yield results for programs that intentionally offer access to food without the same stigmas and ID requirements that may accompany traditional food bank programs. Community fridge and pantry programs often provide lower-barrier options to free food, although their stock/supply is not guaranteed and these services are only available in select communities.

Community Gardens and seed exchanges offer opportunities for people to participate in and learn about food production, although each program may have different processes to participate and register that may or may not provide barriers for precarious and out-of-status individuals.

Meal & Breakfast Programs

Individuals with lapsed or precarious status may be able to access free or low-cost meals programs in their community. Note that some community food programs require referrals or serve a specific demographic (e.g., youth, women). Schools and community organizations may also provide free breakfast programs for marginalized students and their caregivers.

Community Food Services Directories

Many communities have their own service directories that provide more details into low and no cost food options available within a specific community. Food service directories can often be found through the local municipality, regional health authority, or community organizations.

While there is no exhaustive list of services across BC, <https://bc.211.ca> and <https://pathwaysbc.ca/community> are places to start looking for community services in your community.

Housing

- Out of status individuals are not eligible for supports through most BC Housing programs
- While refugee claimants can access the BC Rental Assistance Program and subsidized housing, eligibility for individuals navigating PRRA is considered on a case-by-case basis by a BC Housing Program Specialist
- Most emergency shelters do not have immigration status requirements, though this may vary depending on the individual shelter

Permanent Housing

BC Housing oversees social housing in British Columbia, including subsidized housing and rental assistance. These programs have residency and status requirements. Applicants must be permanent residents not under sponsorship, except where BC Housing has accepted that private sponsorship has broken down or refugee claimants. For individuals whose refugee claims are found to be ineligible for IRB referral yet may be eligible for the PRRA process, their application falls in a grey area that will be considered on a case by-case basis reviewed by a Program Specialist. Providing BC Housing with documentation and evidence related to the refugee claim can help support their application. Out of status individuals do not qualify for BC Rental Assistance Program (RAP) or Subsidized Housing.

Out of status individuals without identification may encounter difficulties applying for market housing. Service providers may find it useful to write letters of recommendation to landlords documenting client reliability or to accompany clients to viewings. AMSSA hosts a Housing Toolkit with information and resources that may prove helpful to this process: <https://www.amssa.org/programs/bc-refugee-resource-network/bccrn-housing-toolkit/>.

Emergency Shelters and Transition Houses

Immigration status is generally not relevant when seeking support from emergency shelters, although each shelter may have its own policy and some shelters may require forms of identification. Service providers can help act as an intermediary when contacting shelter intake to help support individuals with precarious status to access shelter.

- 211 BC Shelter List: The Shelter List details available shelter beds and mats for women, youth, and families in Metro Vancouver, the Fraser Valley, and Greater Victoria. The list is updated Monday to Friday (excluding stat holidays) twice a day at 11:30am and 7:30pm. Individuals can also call or text 2-1-1 to find available shelter beds in the Lower Mainland and Victoria. See the list at: <https://bc.211.ca/shelter-lists/>
- BC Housing Transition and Safe Homes List: A list of transition houses and safe homes in BC that support women and children leaving situations of violence. See the list at: <https://www.bchousing.org/housing-assistance/women-fleeing-violence/transition-houses-safe-homes>
- Shelter Safe: Online Resource for women and children seeking safety from violence and abuse. Access the resource at: <https://sheltersafe.ca/>

Healthcare

- Clients invited to complete a PRRA are eligible for IFHP coverage
- Clients need a valid work permit of at least six months to qualify for MSP
- Some community health centres may offer more flexibility to individuals without medical coverage
- Eligibility for the Canadian Dental Care Plan requires an individual to file taxes in the previous calendar year
- Individuals without dental care coverage may want to explore free or low-cost dental clinics
- Mental health programs and services in BC vary in their eligibility requirements; contact individual programs or services for more information
- Crisis lines do not require valid immigration status to access

In BC, those without healthcare coverage through a program such as Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) or Medical Services Plan (MSP) may be required to pay out-of-pocket for costs incurred. Some providers may refuse healthcare services to individuals unable to pay the out-of-pocket cost.

Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP)

IFHP coverage is available to those whose claims for refugee protection are ineligible to be referred to the IRB but are eligible to apply for a PRRA. Those who are out of status and who are ineligible to apply for a PRRA application or have received a negative decision on their PRRA are ineligible. For full details, see:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/help-within-canada/health-care/interim-federal-health-program/eligibility.html>.

Note that beginning May 1, 2026 supplemental health care services covered by IFHP have a 30% copay (out-of-pocket payment) imposed. Supplemental services include urgent dental care, vision care, mental health counselling, and assistive devices. There is also a \$4 copay for medications.

Medical Services Plan (MSP)

MSP coverage requires an individual to be a citizen or permanent resident, or to be a refugee claimant under the provisions of a work or study permit valid for at least six months. Out of status individuals are not eligible for MSP coverage. Some holders of work and study permits, such as refugee claimants and those applying for a PRRA, may be deemed residents for purposes of MSP coverage. For full details, see:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/health-drug-coverage/msp/bc-residents/eligibility-and-enrolment/are-you-eligible>.

Community Health Centres

For individuals with no health coverage, community health centres sometimes offer more flexibility. Some community health clinics specifically offer care to uninsured patients, and they may have lower cost or sliding scale health services. HealthLinkBC has a directory of community health centres that can be searched by location: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/primary-care/service-type/community-health-centres>.

Canadian Dental Care Plan

Eligibility for the Canadian Dental Care Plan requires an individual to have filed taxes in Canada in the previous calendar year. This means individuals without a Social Insurance Number are ineligible. Those who did file tax returns in the previous calendar year, and who do not have access to private dental insurance or coverage, may be eligible. For detailed information about qualifying for the CDCP, visit: <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/dental/dental-care-plan/qualify.html>.

Dental Clinics

There are some dental clinics that offer free or low-cost services. Contact a dental clinic directly to find out what identification, health coverage, and/or income verification they require for their services. BC Dental offers a directory of reduced cost clinics in BC: <https://bcdental.org/public-education/cost-of-dentistry/reduced-cost-clinics/>

Mental Health

Information about programs for mental health and substance use support in BC can be found on <https://helpstartshere.gov.bc.ca/>. Some programs may require MSP coverage to access, and may therefore be unavailable to some individuals with lapsed or precarious status. To find out individual program eligibility, contact the appropriate program or service directly.

Youth – Foundry BC services offers free and confidential mental health and wellness services to any youth residing in BC between the ages of 12 and 24. They do not check immigration status and offer in person and virtual support. More information is available at: <https://foundrybc.ca/>

Some organizations offer lower-cost, sliding-scale and free counselling options. Vancouver has a list of reduced-cost counselling options that is frequently updated which can be accessed at: <https://willowtreecounselling.ca/wp-content/uploads/resources/reduced-cost-counselling.pdf>. Those in other communities may be able to find similar organizations in their community or email HeretoHelp through their website <https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/contact-us> for local recommendations. One example is <https://healingincolour.com/>, which connects BIPOC therapists and clients. Some therapists offer pro bono sessions to refugees and refugee claimants.

For clients struggling to manage severe mental health challenges, such as suicidality, crisis lines are available. Most take calls 24/7 and none check for immigration status. They do not replace formal mental health treatment, but they can be helpful for clients in crisis.

- Mental Health Crisis Line 24/7: [310-6789](tel:310-6789) (no area code needed)
- Kids Help phone: Youth can call [1 800 668-6868](tel:18006686868) or text TALK to 686868. Texting support for adults available by texting TALK to 741741. Resources available online at <https://kidshelpphone.ca/>
- Suicide Hotline 24/7: Call [1-800-784-2433](tel:18007842433) (toll-free) in B.C. Call or text [9-8-8](tel:988) (toll-free) in Canada. Access in up to 140 languages
- CRCL: Crisis Response, Community Led. Visit website for CRCL contact information for seven communities (North Shore, New West, Victoria, Prince George, Comox Valley, Kamloops, and Kelowna): <https://crcl.ca/#link-cards>
- Racist Incident Hotline: 1-833-457-5463
- VictimlinkBC: 1-800-563-0808 (call or text); email: 211-VictimLinkBC@uwbc.ca

Education

Elementary and Secondary School

- School boards may accept those with precarious immigration status, refuse to enroll children without proof of citizenship, or accept students on a case-by-case basis
- In cases where school boards refuse to accept out of status children, it may be possible to support families to request a reconsideration (see below for more details)

School boards set their own policies around enrollment eligibility. Some may require valid immigration status to enroll a child. The School Act outlines how school boards must provide educational instruction free of charge to every student of school age residing in BC provided they are ordinarily resident in BC, although school boards can set their own definition of residence and charge out of province/international students.

Post-Secondary School

- Most post-secondary institutions require students to maintain valid immigration status
- Study permits are automatically cancelled within 7 days of the issuance of an enforceable removal order
- IRB ineligible clients who are likely to be eligible to submit a PRRA may be eligible to apply for a new study permit, although there is no clear policy
- Financial aid opportunities are limited for out of status individuals, but Unbordered Knowledge has a database of some opportunities
- Individuals with precarious status may be able to access continuing education courses that last less than six months and distance learning education courses as these do not require study permits, but the documentation required to enroll will differ by institution

Full-time Enrollment

Previously issued study permits are automatically cancelled within 7 days of someone receiving an enforceable removal order, which will impact individuals found ineligible for IRB referral, unless their removal order is stayed. If they are IRB ineligible but would likely be eligible to submit a PRRA, they may be eligible to apply for a new study permit.

Many post-secondary institutions specify that an individual must maintain immigration status throughout their studies to keep full-time enrollment. Individuals with precarious immigration status must typically apply to access college and university as international students and usually pay higher tuition rates.

Two universities in Ontario, York University and Toronto Metropolitan University have Sanctuary Scholars programs to provide access to university-level education at the cost of domestic tuition for individuals with precarious status. More information on these programs can be found at

<https://www.yorku.ca/unit/vpacad/2023/12/12/the-sanctuary-scholar-program/> and

<https://www.torontomu.ca/social-innovation/sanctuaryscholars/>. Many out of status individuals, however, are ineligible for most financial aid.

S4Collective has useful resources for individuals with precarious status interested in post-secondary education in Ontario at: <https://www.s4collective.org/projects-and-resources/blog-post-title-two-452mb>. Unbordered Knowledge has a database of funding opportunities for individuals with precarious status at: <https://www.unborderedknowledge.com/scholarships>.

Continuing Education

Study permits are not required for courses that last less than 6 months, so individuals with precarious status may be able to enroll in short-term continuing education courses that do not count towards a degree program. Distance learning courses also do not require immigration status in Canada, but these programs are ineligible for Post-Graduate Work Permits. Note that depending on the program, the specific college or university may ask for further documentation (e.g., SIN, visa, etc.) that might create barriers for out of status individuals, so it is important to check the specific requirements for each program.

ELL classes

- Out of status individuals do not qualify for government-funded ELL classes
- PRRA applicants can access Safe Haven ELL classes
- Informal ELL learning and conversation circles may be available through community and faith groups

Out of status individuals do not qualify for government-funded ELL classes. Safe Haven ELL classes are available for refugee claimants, including PRRA destined or PRRA applicants. See the Safe Haven Program Policy Manual for full details. Community and faith groups may host informal ELL learning and conversation circles that can be accessed by individuals with any immigration status.

Recreational, Cultural, and Youth Services

Municipal recreation services

- The City of Vancouver and the City of New Westminster have access without fear/sanctuary policies that state everyone, no matter their immigration status, should be able to use city facilities and programs
- The risk and ID requirements to access programs in other municipalities without Sanctuary policies will differ depending on the municipality
- Service providers can contact community centres to learn their specific policy and see if recreational activities are available at discounted rates

Access to municipal recreational services vary depending on the municipality. A couple of municipalities (e.g., City of Vancouver, City of New Westminster) have variations on sanctuary policies, which facilitate access to municipal services for out of status individuals.

Accessing some recreational services may require registration (name, email, address) as well as ID. Some municipalities have programs to help connect individuals with recreation activities at a discounted rate, which can be more easily facilitated if service providers connect with community centre staff.

Public Libraries

Most public libraries have a wide variety of services that are accessible to people with precarious status

Libraries offer many free services, programs and events such as children and family programs, social clubs and youth programs. Some also provide services such as internet access, employment workshops and English language practice. For some services such as book borrowing, a library card may be required. However, some libraries can provide a temporary card for those who may not have the accepted forms of ID that library needs to issue a card. Libraries across BC may have different practices so check with your local library on what services people with precarious status can access.

Community youth programs

Searching for youth service directories/resource guides can provide information about youth groups and drop-ins available to youth with precarious status

Recreational youth groups or drop-ins may offer opportunities for youth to connect without referrals or registration. More dedicated and formal youth support programs may have eligibility criteria or referral processes, although specifics will be organization dependent. Some municipalities have youth services directories or resource guides that collate the list of youth services available within a community.

While not exhaustive, <https://bc.211.ca> contains listings of youth programs across BC.

Cultural support services

Cultural community groups can often provide informal support to individuals with precarious status that may be difficult to otherwise access through formal services

In general, it is best to connect newcomers with cultural groups that align with their own cultural background. This helps individuals and families build local community through connections with groups who share familiar cultural norms. However, some clients may not wish to connect with their co-cultural community; in such cases, it is best to respect their wishes.

The following guide offers a starting point for finding cultural community organizations:

<https://multiculturalcouncilofcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/bc-directory-of-community-organizations.pdf>

Faith-based groups

Faith-based groups may provide connection and informal support as well as food, clothing, meals and other necessities to individuals and families in need

Service providers can help connect clients with precarious status to faith-based groups where appropriate. It is best to connect clients to groups who share their faith. While many faith-based groups provide support to community members regardless of their faith, in an ideal situation the client would receive supports from a familiar faith tradition and can also build community locally. Always check with the client to be sure they understand who they are being connected with and what to expect. Some clients may have reservations about connecting with some or all faith-based groups; always respect the client's wishes in this regard.