

Getting Started



Resources for Newcomers

General resources section provides essential information and resources for newcomers, guiding you through the steps to take both before your arrival in British Columbia and during your first few days after arriving. It includes important details to help you settle smoothly and confidently into your new life.

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Step 1: Before You Arrive in BC

Preparing thoroughly before your arrival ensures a smoother transition and helps you feel more confident as you begin your new life in BC.

• Gather Information

- Visit [Welcome BC](#) for comprehensive information about living and working in British Columbia.
- Read the [BC Newcomers' guide](#) to understand essential steps for a smooth transition.

• Prepare Documentation

- Ensure you have valid travel documents, including [Electronic Travel Authorization](#).
- Bring certified, translated copies of essential documents, such as:
 - Birth certificates
 - Marriage or divorce certificates
 - Educational degrees and transcripts
 - Medical records and immunization history
 - Driver's license and driving record (for license conversion)
- Check Professional Credentials: Contact your professional association in BC to determine whether you need to verify your credentials and understand the steps involved.
 - Certain professions, such as healthcare, engineering, or education, may require certification, credential assessment, or additional training to meet Canadian or BC standards.
 - Confirm any associated fees, required documentation, and processing timelines to ensure you're fully prepared before starting your career in BC.

• Connect with Community Groups

- Contact Our Newcomers Program Manager, Aluma Zweifler at areicher@jewishvancouver.com to connect and learn more about online orientation sessions, community initiatives, and other resources.
- Social Media Groups: Join local groups to connect with others and stay informed about events. Start with the Jewish Federation's [Facebook page](#) to explore opportunities and build connections.
- Smiley Package:
- [Fill out our form](#) to let us know when you're planning to arrive, and we'll do our best to welcome you with a Smiley Package—a warm gesture to help you feel at home.

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• Plan Your Arrival

- Arrange Accommodation: see our Housing Resources for Newcomers.
- **If Traveling with Children:**
 - Research schools or childcare services near your planned residence.
 - Check enrollment requirements and gather necessary documentation (e.g., proof of residence, vaccination records).
 - Understand the school system in BC before you arrive.
 - Read more about the BC Education System and Jewish Education in our Education Resources section.
- **If Traveling with Pets:**
 - Review regulations for bringing pets to BC, including vaccination, microchipping, and quarantine requirements.
 - Learn about pet-friendly accommodation and locate nearby veterinary services.
 - Research costs for pets, including food and health care and adjust your budget estimation.
- **Prepare Financially:**
 - Understand the cost of living in BC, including housing, groceries, transportation, and utilities.
 - Use online tools or resources to compare costs and create a realistic budget.
 - If you are not moving with a pre-arranged job, plan for a few months without income while you look for work.
 - Research unemployment rates and job markets in your industry to set realistic expectations.
 - Familiarize yourself with currency exchange rates and consider having international credit.
 - Research international bank transfers and fees to avoid unexpected costs.
 - Keep additional savings or access to emergency funds for unforeseen situations like medical emergencies or urgent travel.
- **Plan for Medical Insurance**
 - In BC, the Medical Services Plan (MSP) has a waiting period of up to three months before coverage begins. See below more information about applying to MSP.
 - To ensure uninterrupted access to healthcare, arrange for private medical insurance to cover this waiting period.
 - Research temporary insurance plans available for newcomers or consult your employer if your job provides transitional coverage.

• Learn About Canadian Customs and Culture

- Read about Canadian workplace norms, cultural etiquette, and the legal rights and responsibilities of residents.
 - [Canadian culture, history and sport](#)
 - [Understanding BC culture and systems](#)
 - [Multicultural BC](#)
 - [BC Statutory Holidays](#)
- Learn about the local climate to pack clothing suitable for BC's diverse weather conditions.
 - [BC Climate](#)



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Step 2: First Steps After Arriving in BC

Welcome to British Columbia! Here are some of the essential steps to help you get started after your arrival.

• Settle In

- Visit [Welcome BC First Few Days](#) for a comprehensive guide on settling in.
- Apply for Essential Identification:
 - Social Insurance Number (SIN): Required for working in Canada. [Apply online to receive SIN](#) or in person at a [Service Canada](#) Centre. Learn why it is important to [protect your SIN](#) number and how.
 - BC Services Card: Grants access to healthcare and other provincial services. [Apply for BC services Card](#) through a [local ICBC office](#).
 - BC Driver's License: If you plan to drive, convert your existing license within 90 days of arrival. Visit [ICBC](#) for details on how to convert your license if you are moving from another province in Canada or from another country.
- Visit [Welcome BC Services](#) and [Watch BC Videos](#) to learn about government services.
- Bank Account: Explore different banks to find newcomer-friendly accounts with benefits such as no fees or added services like credit card offers. Compare options from major Canadian banks (e.g., RBC, TD, Scotiabank, CIBC, BMO) and credit unions. Once you choose a bank, visit a local branch to open an account. Bring the following documents:
 - Passport or valid government-issued ID
 - Immigration documents (e.g., work permit, study permit, or PR card)
 - Proof of address (e.g., lease agreement or utility bill)

• Connect with Jewish Community

- [Fill out our form](#) and tell us more about yourself, your needs, and interest so we can guide you through your journey as a newcomer.
- Visit our [Community Directory](#) webpage to explore community program or organizations that fit your needs.
- Check our [Community Calendar](#) to learn about events happening in our community.

• Learn Emergencies Numbers

- Save key emergency contacts:
 - 911 Police, Fire, Ambulance
 - 988 [BC Crisis Centre](#) text or call.
 - 811 [Health Link BC](#), 24/7 confidential health information and advice
 - 711 Health Link BC Deaf or hearing-impaired (TTY)
 - 310-6789 Emotional support, information, and resources specific to mental health
 - 1-800-668-6868 [Kids Help Phone](#)- Immediate and caring support, information and, if necessary, referral to a local community or social service agency
- For non-emergency numbers:
 - Visit [EComm911](#) and search by location.
 - Contact [Jewish Family Services Careline](#) at [\(604\) 558-5719](#).

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• Understand BC Healthcare Services

Accessing healthcare in British Columbia is essential for maintaining your well-being. Here's what you need to know to ensure continuous and comprehensive medical coverage:

- Apply for MSP (Medical Services Plan):
 - **Apply for [MSP \(Medical Services Plan\)](#) immediately after arriving.**
 - Learn what services MSP covers by visiting the [services MSP covers](#) webpage.
 - MSP coverage begins after a three-month waiting period, so it's critical to arrange temporary private medical insurance to cover this gap.
- Learn about additional programs and eligibility:
 - [Pharmacare](#): Provides prescription drug coverage based on income.
 - [Supplementary-benefits](#): Offers coverage for certain health services not included in MSP.
 - [Employees benefits](#): If employed, check if your workplace provides extended health benefits to cover prescription drugs, equipment, and services not included in MSP.
 - [BC Dental program](#)- If you receive income or disability assistance, you may be able to have basic dental costs covered
- Find a Family Doctor: Finding a family doctor is an important step for accessing consistent healthcare in BC. Use the following platform to find one:
 - Register on the [HealthLink BC](#) website to be added to the list for finding a family doctor.
 - [Pathways medical care](#)
 - [Find a doctor BC](#)
 - Ask friends and community groups if they know a clinic/doctor accepting new patients.
 - If a family doctor isn't immediately available, consider using walk-in clinics or virtual care platforms until one is secured.
- Locate Emergency and Non-Emergency Care:
 - Use [Medimap.ca](#) or Google to locate the nearest walk-in clinic or urgent care centre.
 - Familiarize yourself with the nearest hospital in case of emergencies.
 - Access virtual healthcare services like [Telus mycare](#) for online medical consultations.
 - [Find a physician or medical professional.](#)
 - Learn about 24/7 confidential health advice through 811 Health Link BC.
 - [Travel Assistance Program BC](#) - check eligibility for non-emergency medical purposes.

• Navigate Public Transportation Services in BC

- [BC Transit](#): Operates buses and transit systems outside Metro Vancouver, such as Victoria and Kelowna.
- [TransLink](#): Provides buses, SkyTrain, SeaBus, and West Coast Express in Metro Vancouver. Purchase a [Compass card](#) for convenient payment.
- Check transit schedules and plan your trips with tools like Google Maps or the [Transit App](#).
- [BC Ferries](#): Offers service to coastal destinations and islands. Routes connect Vancouver to Victoria, Nanaimo, and other locations.



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• Access Settlement Services

Settlement services are essential for a smooth transition into life in British Columbia. These free programs provide newcomers with tools, guidance, and connections to navigate their new environment effectively. By using these resources, you can save time, reduce stress, and build a strong foundation for success. Engaging with these services can help you overcome challenges, connect with the community, and access opportunities more quickly.

- Start by using [IRCC Newcomers Services](#) to locate settlement offices near you. Simply enter your postal code to receive a tailored list of nearby services and organizations.
- Trusted Local Organizations:
 - [WelcomeBC Settlement Services](#)
 - [New to BC](#)- you can find information about English classes, employment, and settlement programs and services near you.
 - [Success BC](#)-you can enter their programs' page and check what programs you are eligible for based on your status: [SuccessBC Programs](#). [SuccessBC Newcomer Services Program](#)- you can find one-on-one consultation and mentorship opportunities.
 - [Mosaic BC](#)- you can find services by hovering over the Find a Service button. Select the status that applies to you to view the relevant services and programs available.
 - [ISSBC](#)

• Explore Beautiful British Columbia

British Columbia (BC) is renowned for its stunning landscapes, vibrant cities, and endless outdoor adventures. Exploring the province not only helps you connect with your new home but also a wonderful way to inspire a sense of connection and enhance your mental well-being. For newcomers, immersing yourself in BC's natural beauty can help reduce stress, boost mood, and provide a sense of calm during the challenges of settling into a new home.

- Visit Provincial and National Parks:
 - [BC Parks](#): With over 1,000 parks, you can enjoy hiking, camping, kayaking, or simply relaxing in nature. Visit [BC Parks](#) to explore destinations and plan your trips.
 - [Responsible Recreation](#): Respect wildlife and follow park guidelines to ensure a safe and sustainable experience.
- Plan Seasonal Activities:
 - [Summer](#): Hiking, mountain biking, paddleboarding, and camping are popular in the warmer months.
 - [Winter](#): Experience world-class skiing and snowboarding at resorts like Whistler Blackcomb, Big White, and Cypress Mountain.
 - [Fall and Spring](#): Enjoy festivals, farmers' markets, and mild weather for outdoor exploration.

Discover BC's natural wonders, from the majestic Rockies and serene Garibaldi Lake to lush forests like Cathedral Grove, stunning waterfalls such as Shannon Falls, and the coastal beauty of Tofino and Pacific Rim National Park.

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• Learn About Additional Support

Navigating life in a new country can be challenging, but British Columbia offers a variety of programs and resources to assist individuals and families. From legal aid to food banks, these services are designed to provide practical support and help you build a stable life in BC. Here are key resources for legal assistance, disability services, and community-specific programs to ensure you have the support you need.

- **Legal Assistance:**
 - Learn about BC's legal system through [Dial-A-Law](#).
 - Access affordable legal services with [Legal Aid BC](#).
- **Disability Support Services:**
 - If you live with a disability, explore programs and services offered by BC. Visit [support and services for people with disabilities](#) to learn more.
 - [Community Living BC](#) (CLBC): A provincial crown agency that funds support and services for adults with developmental disabilities and their families, aiming to foster inclusive communities.
 - [Autism BC](#): A non-profit promoting understanding, acceptance, and inclusion for people with autism in BC through advocacy, referrals, and support services.
- **Family and Youth Services:**
 - [PLEA Community Services](#): Offers programs in youth justice, health, education, employment, and family support, focusing on vulnerable children, youth, and adults to help them lead fulfilling lives within their communities.
 - [BC Council for Families](#): Provides programs and resources aimed at strengthening families in BC, including parenting workshops, support groups, and educational materials.
- **Mental Health and Substance Use:**
 - [BC organizations mental health and substance use](#) - list of organizations in BC providing support.
- **Support within the Jewish Community:**
 - [Jewish Family Services \(JFS\)](#): provides a wide range of resources and programs for individuals and families. Contact their Careline at (604) 558-5719 or visit [JFS Vancouver](#) for assistance. Key programs include:
 - [Affordable Mental Health & Counselling](#): Accessible counseling services for emotional well-being.
 - [Food services](#): Assistance for food security, including food bank programs.
 - [JFS Homelessness Prevention](#): Resources to help individuals and families avoid homelessness.
 - [Tikva Housing Society](#): Provides affordable housing solutions for individuals and families in need. Learn about their programs, eligibility, and application process at [Tikva Housing Society](#).
 - [Hebrew Free Loan Association \(HFLA\)](#): Offers interest-free loans to help with financial challenges such as education, medical expenses, and housing. Visit [HFLA](#) to learn about eligibility and application details.
 - [Jewish Addiction Community Service \(JACS\)](#): Offers confidential support and resources for individuals and families dealing with addiction. JACS provides counseling, recovery programs, and community support.
 - [JCC Inclusion Services](#): Promotes inclusivity for individuals with disabilities through programs and resources at the Jewish Community Centre (JCC). Contact JCC to learn more about their programs.