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Ministry of Health
Ministry of Transportation and Transit

Travel supports increase access to health care

PORT ALBERNI – More people living in rural, remote and First Nations communities will benefit from free ferry service when travelling for non-emergency medical specialist appointments through an expansion to the Travel Assistance Program (TAP).

"The Travel Assistance Program lessens the financial burden for people who have to travel away from home for health-care services, meaning they can focus on their health instead of their wallet," said Josie Osborne, Minister of Health. "Although travel on BC Ferries has long been covered for people through TAP, expanding coverage to privately managed ferry routes means more people living in rural, remote and First Nations communities will benefit from much-needed help with their travel costs."

Beginning Dec. 19, 2024, seven additional ferry routes are being added to TAP, which supports patients with the cost of ground, air or ferry travel to access non-emergency medical specialist services not available in their own community. In 2023-24, 98,248 TAP approvals were issued.

"Dealing with health-related matters can be stressful enough, without the added burden of extra travel costs," said Mike Farnworth, Minister of Transportation and Transit. "Through BC Ferries and TAP, we're making sure that people travelling for medical reasons have their travel costs covered, and that essential travel is as affordable and stress-free as possible."

The expansion includes round trip travel on the following independently operated ferry routes:

- Tahsis and Kyuquot to Gold River
- Dodge Cove to Prince Rupert
- Lasqueti Island to French Creek
- Bamfield, Kildonan and Haggard's Cove to Port Alberni
- Ahousaht and Hot Springs Cove to Tofino
- Metlakatla, Oona River, Kitkatla and Hartley Bay to Prince Rupert
- Tuck Inlet to Prince Rupert, Aero Point (Lax Kw'alaams Ferry)

"Access to quality health care shouldn't depend on where in B.C. you choose to live," said Debra Toporowski, parliamentary secretary for rural health. "By making TAP available to people living in these ferry-dependent communities, we're not only reducing financial strain for people who have to travel outside their community for care. We're also making health-care access more equitable and ensuring that people in rural and remote communities don't get left behind."

Expanding TAP is part of the Province's work to improve health equity for people living in rural and remote communities and builds on investments in medical travel and accommodation support through the Canadian Cancer Society and Hope Air.

Quick Facts:

- TAP is a corporate partnership between the Ministry of Health and private transportation carriers.
- Eligible medical specialist services include:
    - non-emergency medical specialist services available at the closest location outside the patient's community; and
    - diagnostic procedures, laboratory procedures, diagnostic radiology, nuclear medicine procedures, BC Cancer Agency, Transplant Units, HIV/AIDS treatment at St. Paul's Hospital, specialty clinics at BC Children's Hospital and other tertiary care hospital services.

Learn More:

To learn more about B.C.'s Travel Assistance Program, visit:
https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/accessing-health-care/tap-bc/travel-assistance-program-tap-bc

To learn more about medical travel supports visit:
https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2024HLTH0119-001272

And: https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2023HLTH0119-001514

A backgrounder follows.

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BRITISH COLUMBIA

BACKGROUNDER

What people are saying about new TAP investments

Christine Boyle, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation –

"Accessing health-care services when you need them in rural, remote and First Nations communities is essential. By expanding timely and easier access to the services people in B.C. need, we are taking action to solve the core challenges people worry about – bringing down costs and strengthening health care – and making a real difference in the daily lives of First Nations and people who live in remote communities."

Nicolas Jimenez, president and CEO, BC Ferries –

"As an essential service, BC Ferries is committed to ensuring that rural and remote communities remain connected to the critical services they need. Access to medical appointments is vital, and by expanding the Travel Assistance Program to more ferry routes, including those serviced by our independent contractors, we are reinforcing our dedication to providing reliable and accessible transportation for the communities that depend on us across B.C."

Richard Jock, CEO, First Nations Health Authority –

"Supporting First Nations people and their families living in community to access the health services they need is key to addressing the substantial gaps that remain in accessing necessary health care services and in closing the gap for health and wellness outcomes of First Nations and non-First Nations Peoples in B.C. This work will take time and effort on all fronts, but partnerships like this are essential to our progress."

Tamara Davidson, MLA for North Coast-Haida Gwaii –

"Improving access to health-care services for rural, remote and First Nations communities is incredibly important, especially for those without local specialist services. The expansion of the Travel Assistance Program will not just ease the financial burden of those who have to leave their communities in order to access specialist services, but also ensure that health-care equity increases across the province."