

Press Release

MSP coverage expanding to all uninsured people for COVID-19 testing **For Immediate Release**

March 30th, 2020 - The BC Health Coalition along with health care workers and public health experts are applauding the BC government's recent decision to expand MSP coverage to all uninsured people for COVID-19 testing and treatment. Now, all migrants in BC (including newly-landed permanent residents, temporary foreign workers, international students, those who have been rendered undocumented and those who have been stuck here since the borders closed) will have vital access to COVID-19 related health care. This is an important step towards ensuring equitable access to Universal Public Health Care while also helping to safeguard all of our health.

Dr. Srinivas Murthy, an infectious disease specialist at UBC leading a national research effort to improve clinical management of COVID-19, emphasized the importance of the policy direction in light of the current crisis: "There is no 'us' against 'them' in a pandemic. As BC and the world try to control the spread and mitigate the effects of COVID-19, it is vital for us to understand that our health is dependent on each other. Barriers to health care, especially for vulnerable populations, only increase risk. Covering COVID-19 related care is a good step forward but it should not stop there. It is important for preventative and primary care to be accessible to everyone too."

Narrowly defining COVID-19 related conditions has already created a lot of confusion in Ontario where a similar policy was announced. People with preventable or chronic conditions not on that list may avoid treatment and risk worsening their condition. At a time when we need to preserve available acute care resources, it is only logical to make sure that uninsured people can, and will, access primary and preventative care to reduce their need for acute care.

Many migrants, including temporary foreign workers, who we depend on for our food supply and other essential services, are often denied access to health care through a web of policies. The [3 month wait](#), which was recently repealed in Ontario and now only exists in BC and Quebec, results in greater long-term health care costs and poor health outcomes for migrants. The BC Health Coalition joined over 25 organizations in writing [letters to the Medical Services Commission](#) calling for its permanent removal.

"COVID-19 has reminded the world that healthcare is a basic human right. We hope to see the BC government continue to remove unnecessary and unreasonable barriers to health care and address existing health inequities. A good first step is the permanent removal of the 3 month wait," emphasized Dr. Mei-Ling Wiedmeyer, a family physician and Clinical Assistant Professor at UBC.

Background:

MSP coverage for migrants has been amended in a number of ways during the crisis. Information concerning extended coverage can be found on [the BC Government website under COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions BC](#).

See Q2, Q8 and Q9. Coverage during the crisis has been expanded to include:

- Individuals present in BC who would otherwise not be eligible for coverage under MSP will be provided provincially insured health care coverage for services related to suspected or confirmed cases of infection with COVID-19. This is contingent on them having called 8-1-1 or otherwise being advised by a medical professional to seek care for symptoms related to COVID-19. Services for unrelated conditions that are performed on non-eligible MSP patients will remain uninsured.
- All Temporary Foreign Workers who have come to work in BC during the pandemic and cannot access private insurance will be covered under MSP.
- People whose work or study permits have expired in Canada may continue to receive temporary MSP coverage. This includes people who have applied for a new permit and therefore have the right to continue to work or study in Canada (referred to as “implied status”) while their new application is decided.

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Media Liaison

Ayendri Riddell

Campaigner, BC Health Coalition

Phone: 604-787-6560

Email: ayendri@bchealthcoalition.ca