



## South Island Division of Family Practice

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# Resource Guide for New-to-Canada Physicians

**The South Island Division of Family Practice acknowledges that we work on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Pacheedaht, T'sou-ke, Scia'new, Songhees, Esquimalt, Tsawout, Tsartlip, Tseycum and Pauquachin First Nations, and home to the Métis and many diverse Indigenous communities.**



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## Welcome to the South Island – We're So Glad You're Here!

On behalf of the South Island Division of Family Practice, we extend our heartfelt welcome to you and your family as you begin this exciting new chapter in British Columbia. We are truly honoured that you've chosen to bring your skills, experience and passion for family medicine to beautiful Vancouver Island.

We understand that moving to a new country to practice medicine is a significant transition, filled with both opportunity and uncertainty. It can be overwhelming to navigate new systems, communities and cultures, all while continuing your professional journey. We've created this guide to help make your move smoother, your settlement easier, and your life here as enriching as possible.

This resource is designed not only for you as a physician, but also for your loved ones. Whether it's finding housing, schools, community services, or simply discovering the best local park, we hope this guide will be a helpful companion as you settle into life on the South Island.

We're thrilled to welcome you to our unique and vibrant community. Vancouver Island is a place of natural beauty, diverse cultures and deep connection; we can't wait to help you discover all that makes it so special.

**Welcome home.**

# Getting Started

## 1. Quick-Start Checklist for New Arrivals

### Essential Documents & Services

- Apply for your B.C. Services Card (health coverage)
- Set up a Canadian bank account
- Get a local SIM card or mobile phone plan
- Apply for a Social Insurance Number (SIN)
- Update your address with relevant authorities

### Housing & Utilities

- Secure temporary or permanent housing
- Set up utilities (electricity, internet, water, etc.)
- Explore neighbourhoods and local amenities

### Family & Education

- Register children in school or daycare
- Explore family-friendly activities and programs
- Explore continuing professional development opportunities

### Professional Setup

- Connect with your clinic or practice site
- Join the South Island Division of Family Practice
- Learn about local medical community events and supports

### Community & Lifestyle

- Explore local grocery stores, markets, and restaurants
- Discover parks, beaches, and recreation centres
- Learn about transportation options (bus, bike, car)

### Support & Connection

- Reach out to your SIDFP contact for support
- Join newcomer or physician support groups through SIDFP
- Connect with other families in the community

## Emergency Contacts & Key Numbers

In case of an emergency or if you need support, here are some important contacts to keep close at hand:

### Emergency Contacts & Key Numbers

- Police, Fire, Ambulance: **911** (Available 24/7 across British Columbia)

### Non-Emergency Police Contacts – South Island Region

Community	Police Department	Phone Number
Saanich	Saanich Police Department	250-475-4321
Sidney / North Saanich	RCMP Detachment (Sidney/North Saanich)	250-656-3931
Sooke	RCMP Detachment (Sooke)	250-642-5241
West Shore (Langford, Colwood, Royal Oak, View Royal, Highlands, Metchosin)	RCMP Detachment (West Shore)	250-474-2264
Salt Spring Island	RCMP Detachment (Salt Spring Island)	250-537-5555

## Health & Medical Support

- HealthLink B.C. (24/7 health advice): 811
- Island Health General Inquiries: 1-877-370-8699
- Poison Control Centre: 1-800-567-8911

## Mental Health & Crisis Support

- Vancouver Island Crisis Line: 1-888-494-3888
- Mental Health Support Line (B.C.-wide): 310-6789
- Suicide Prevention Line: 1-800-784-2433
- Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868

## Banking in Canada

Opening a Canadian bank account is one of the first steps to help you manage your finances and receive your salary. Most banks require two pieces of ID (e.g., passport, work permit) and proof of address. Some offer newcomer packages with no-fee accounts for the first year.

For more information about banking, the Canadian Bankers Association website can answer many questions about banking in Canada: <https://cba.ca/for-canadians/banking-and-you>

### Major Banks in the Area

- RBC (Royal Bank of Canada)
- TD Canada Trust
- Scotiabank
- BMO (Bank of Montreal)
- CIBC
- Coast Capital Savings (local credit union)
- Credit Scores & Transferring Money
- Learn how Canadian credit scores work and how to build credit history.
- Explore options for international money transfers (e.g., Wise, Western Union, bank wire transfers).

## Physician Specific Financial Support

- MD Management, located in Victoria, specializes in financial services for physicians.
- A dedicated contact is available to support international physicians with banking, investments, and financial planning.
- Please visit their [newcomer physicians webpage](#) for more information.
- Please contact Kristi Plumridge, Physician Engagement Specialist:

**T: [778-215-6807](tel:778-215-6807) | E: [kristi.plumridge@md.ca](mailto:kristi.plumridge@md.ca)**

## Phone & Internet

Staying connected is essential for both work and personal life. Most cellular companies have kiosks in local malls where employees can assist you with purchasing a phone, setting up a local phone number and purchasing plans.

Popular Mobile Carriers: Telus, Rogers, Bell, Freedom Mobile, Shaw (now part of Rogers), Fido, Koodo, and Virgin (budget-friendly options)

### Tips for Choosing a Plan

- Compare coverage in your area (especially on Salt Spring Island or rural areas).
- Look for bundled deals (e.g., phone + internet).
- Consider prepaid plans if you don't yet have a Canadian credit history.

## Housing

Finding a place to live can take time, especially in high-demand areas. If renting, knowing your rights as a renter is essential to avoid scams. Below are some housing resources to help you in your search.

### Rental Resources

- SIDFP Housing Directory: Please contact [info@sidfp.com](mailto:info@sidfp.com) for a current list of housing available for physicians in the region
- Craigslist Victoria: <https://victoria.craigslist.org/>
- UsedVictoria: <https://www.usedvictoria.com/real-estate>
- Med Housing: <https://www.medshousing.com/>
- Local Facebook housing groups

Property Management Companies: many local property management companies list rentals on their own sites:

- [Brown Bro](#)
- [Devon Properties](#)
- [Proline Management](#)

### Tips for Navigating Housing in BC

- Review the [Residential Tenancy Branch](#) guidelines.
- Understand your rights and responsibilities as a tenant.
- Be cautious of rental scams—never send money before viewing a property or confirming legitimacy.
- The Government of Canada offers information on housing in Canada for newcomers here.
- The Canada Mortgage Housing Association also offers resources and checklists for newcomers for both renting and purchasing a home in Canada. Their guides can be found [here](#).

## 2. Health & Wellness

### How to Apply for MSP (B.C. Medical Services Plan)

All residents of British Columbia must enroll in MSP to access provincial healthcare services. Newcomers should apply as soon as they arrive for each member of their family. Coverage typically begins after a waiting period (the remainder of the month of arrival plus two months).

You can apply:

- Online: [Apply for MSP](#)
- By Mail: Submit the HLTH 101 form
- In Person: Visit any Service B.C. location

After applying, you will receive a B.C. Services Card, which is used to access all healthcare services.

### B.C. PharmaCare (Prescription Drug Coverage)

After enrolling in MSP, residents should also register for B.C. PharmaCare, the provincial program that helps cover the cost of eligible prescription medications and some medical supplies. Coverage is based on household income, and registration is free — most people can apply online using their B.C. Services Card once their MSP application is underway.

### Physician Wellness Programs

- Doctors of B.C. offers a Physician Health Program for B.C. physicians. More information can be found [here](#)
- Island Health has health, wellness and urgent support services for physicians listed [here](#)

### Physician Support & Peer Programs

- The South Island Peer Support Program offers confidential, one-on-one emotional support from trained physician peers. This is coordinated by the South Island Medical Staff Association and supported by the Physician Health Program and Joint Collaborative Committees. Learn more or connect with a peer supporter [here](#)
- Additional wellness resources and social events are available through the South Island Division of Family Practice [here](#)

### BCALM (BC Association for Living Mindfully)

Presentations, workshops, and full courses in mindfulness-based stress management. [More information can be found here.](#)

### Recreation Centres

The South Island hosts many recreation centres with state-of-the-art facilities and programming for individuals and families alike. Below is a listing of recreation centres in the South Island region:

- Saanich Recreation: Commonwealth Place, Gordon Head Recreation, Cedar Hill Recreation and G.R. Pearkes Recreation Centre
- Westshore Parks & Recreation: Juan de Fuca Recreation Centre and the North Langford Recreation Centre
- Peninsula Recreation: Panorama Recreation Centre in North Saanich
- Saltspring Island: Rainbow Recreation Centre

Most recreation centres offer summer camps for children, as well as school-year programming such as swimming lessons, soccer clubs, skating, hockey, dance and more. Registration for each term generally occurs quarterly on a day set by each recreation organization and it is recommended that for popular programming such as swimming lessons, you register as early as possible.

In addition to recreation centres, many paid private gyms throughout the region offer exercise and health programming for residents. For additional resources, Tourism Victoria offers a searchable database for sports and outdoor activities in the region, which can be found [here](#).

### **Allied Health Professionals**

Allied Health Professionals in B.C. encompass over 70 occupations in the healthcare realm, including physiotherapists, optometrists, dieticians, speech pathologists and more.

Some allied healthcare is provided free of charge to B.C. residents with an MSP card. For example, all children in B.C. with an MSP number can access a free eye exam at any licensed optometrist twice a year to the age of 18.

Other services require payment and can sometimes be covered by private health insurance. More information on allied health in B.C. can be found [here](#).

## **3. Family & Education**

### **School Registration**

**Public Schools:** Funded by the provincial government and free for residents. Placement is usually based on catchment area. There are four school districts in the South Island area: SD61 (Greater Victoria), SD62 (Sooke), SD63 (Saanich), and SD64 (Gulf Islands).

**Private/Independent Schools:** Charge tuition and may offer specialized programs (e.g., Montessori, IB). Options include:

- Montessori schools (Westmont, Maria Montessori, Selkirk Montessori)
- Glenlyon Norfolk School
- St. Patrick's Elementary

- Christ Church Cathedral Elementary
- Pacific Christian School
- St. Michaels University School
- St. Andrew's Regional High School
- Brooks Westshore
- St. Margaret's School

### **How to Register Your Children**

Children in B.C. typically begin kindergarten at age 5. To register:

- For private schools, contact the schools directly using contact information from their websites.
- For public schools, first find your local school district using the School Locator Tool, which can be found on any of the School District websites.
- Contact the district or visit their website for registration forms and instructions.
- Required documents include proof of age (birth certificate or passport), proof of residency, proof of address and immunization records.
- Note: most school districts close their offices over the summer. If you are having trouble reaching anyone, reach out to the School District headquarters where staff will be available all year.

### **What to Expect in B.C.'s School System**

- Grades range from kindergarten to Grade 12. Most elementary schools run from kindergarten to grade 5, with middle schools running from grades 6-8, and high schools running from grades 9-12. Some private schools differ slightly.
- Many districts offer French immersion, Indigenous education, and support for English Language Learners.
- If you need before or after school care, contact your school to inquire about the onsite program or local community programs in nearby. Alternatively, the B.C. Government offers a Childcare Resource & Referral Agency who can assist you in your search. Find more information [here](#).

### **Finding Childcare**

- Use the B.C. Government Child Care Map to locate licensed providers in your area: <https://maps.gov.bc.ca/ess/hm/ccf/>
- Options include full-day, part-day, and preschool programs.

### **Continuing Professional Development Opportunities**

Family Physicians in B.C. earn credits for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) through the College of Family Physicians of Canada's Mainpro+ program. Credits are earned by participation in accredited learning activities. Both the South Island Division of Family Practice and University of British Columbia's Division of CPD offer programming to earn credits.

The College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) offers a Professional Learning Plan (PLP) tool to help with planning of learning goals. The Government of B.C. also offers CPD credits for engaging with B.C. Guidelines.

## Post-Secondary Institutions

- University of Victoria (UVic): A large public research university with undergraduate and graduate programs, including sciences, humanities, business, and health-related fields. UVic is known for its strong research focus and extensive student supports.
- Camosun College: A public college offering certificates, diplomas, trades training, and university-transfer programs, with an emphasis on applied learning and workforce readiness. Camosun is a popular choice for newcomers seeking flexible pathways into post-secondary education or employment.
- Royal Roads University: A public university specializing in applied and professional programs, primarily at the graduate and degree-completion level. Royal Roads is known for programs designed for working professionals and internationally trained learners.
- University of British Columbia (UBC): UBC's Faculty of Medicine advances the field of continuing professional development (CPD) through the design, delivery, accreditation, evaluation and research of lifelong learning opportunities for health professionals in B.C. and beyond.

## UBC Faculty of Medicine on the Island

- Island Medical Program: Delivers UBC's MD Undergraduate Program in collaboration with the University of Victoria. Find out more [here](#).
- Residency Programs: UBC runs a number of residency programs with distributed campuses on the South Island. [The Family Practice Residency Program](#) hosts a total of 50 residents locally with many working in local family practice clinics and hospital sites.
- Teaching in Clinics: Many family practice clinics and all hospitals in the South Island host medical students and residents for learning opportunities. Find out more about teaching and mentoring IMP students [here](#). Find out more about teaching and mentoring residents by contacting the local residency program [here](#).

## 4. Community & Culture

### Public Libraries

Greater Victoria libraries are served by the [Greater Victoria Public Library \(GVPL\)](#), which has 12 locations across the region, including the Westshore area, accessible via [GVPL](#). The Peninsula area is served by the [Peninsula Library System \(PLS\)](#), an interactive system that allows you to find libraries in the region. Libraries on Salt Spring Island are run by the [Salt Spring Island Public Library Association](#) and are part of the CRD.

To borrow books and materials, you need to sign up for a free library card by visiting any local branch. You will need ID that verifies your identity and current address within the library's service area.

## Cultural Resources

### Multicultural Organizations

The South Island is home to many organizations that celebrate and support cultural diversity:

- [Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria \(ICA\)](#) – Offers settlement services, cultural programming, and community events.
- [Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society \(VIRCS\)](#) – Provides support for newcomers including youth and family programs.
- A full directory of multicultural organizations in B.C. is available [here](#).

### Language Learning Support

Many organizations offer English language classes and conversation groups for families:

- [AMSSA Member Agencies](#) – Provides language, employment, and counselling services across BC.
- [WelcomeBC](#) – Lists settlement services that include language support and multilingual assistance.

## Faith-Based Resources

### Local Places of Worship

The South Island region includes a wide variety of faith communities:

- Churches: Anglican, Catholic, Baptist, United, Lutheran, and more
- Synagogues: Congregation Emanu-El in Victoria
- Mosques and Gurdwaras: Sikh and Muslim places of worship
- Buddhist and Hindu temples also serve local communities
- A comprehensive list of places of worship can be found [here](#)

### Interfaith Communities & Support Groups

- Many churches and community centres host interfaith events and social gatherings.
- The Multifaith Action Society of B.C. promotes dialogue and understanding across religious traditions.

### Museums & Cultural Sites

- Royal B.C. Museum – World-class exhibits on natural and human history
- Thunderbird Park – Outdoor totem pole and heritage site beside the museum
- Fossil Museums & Dinosaur Events – Family-friendly attractions across the Island

## Community Events

- Seasonal festivals, art shows, concerts, and farmers markets are listed on the [Vancouver Island Events Calendar](#).

## Local Parks and Trails

The South Island offers abundant green spaces and facilities:

- Local Biking and Walking Trails: The [Galloping Goose](#) trail and [Lochside Trail](#).
- [Capital Regional District \(CRD\) Parks](#): The CRD offers many forested, lake and oceanfront parks that are popular for many land and water-based activities. Some popular parks to explore include: Mount Work Regional Park, East Sooke Regional Park, Elk Beaver Lake Park, Witty's Lagoon Park and Francis King Park.
- [Provincial Parks](#): Managed by B.C. Parks, these parks on the South Island are famous for their beauty, camping and activities: Goldstream Provincial Park, Sooke Provincial Park, Juan de Fuca Provincial Park
- [National Parks](#): The Gulf Islands National Park Reserves is a collection of islands accessible by boat, offering diverse coastal landscapes.
- Gardens: The South Island is famous for its gardens, with locations like [Butchart Gardens](#) and [Finnerty Gardens](#) being popular year-round.

## Weekend Getaways

Looking to explore beyond your new neighbourhood? Here are some top weekend destinations near Victoria:

- Salt Spring Island – Artisan markets, hiking, and ocean views
- Tofino – Surfing, beaches, and rainforest adventures
- Sidney – Whale watching, waterfront walks, and boutique shopping
- Cowichan Valley – Vineyards, gourmet dining, and scenic drives
- Sooke – Rugged coastline, forest trails, and fishing spots
- Galiano, Saturna, Pender, Mayne Island – Peaceful beaches and artistic communities
- Shawnigan Lake – Swimming, boating, and forest hikes

# 5. Shopping & Transportation

## Local Grocery Stores

- Thrifty Foods, Save-On-Foods, Fairway Markets, Root Cellar and Red Barn Market are popular grocery chains across the South Island.
- Walmart, Real Canadian Superstore and Costco are also available options.

- [South Island FarmHub](#) offers fresh, local, and sustainable food delivered to your door. It partners with over 45 farms and 30 food producers.
- [Saanich Organics](#) offers a CSA box delivery service (Community Supported Agriculture) every week or every other week.

### International Food Markets

- Island Afrikan Supermarket – African groceries and goods in Victoria
- Varsha Indian Kitchen – Indian cuisine and ingredients
- Damascus Food Market – Middle Eastern halal food and products
- Italian Food Imports – Fine Italian food imports
- Fisgard Market – Asian groceries, products and produce
- Aubergine Foods – South African food and products
- The Wooden Shoe Deli – Dutch specialty store and deli
- Anar Food & Grocery – Persian food and products
- Halal Urban Fresh Meats – Halal fresh meats and grocery store

### Public Transportation

- B.C. Transit operates buses throughout the South Island, including Victoria, Saanich, Langford, and Salt Spring Island.
- Use the [B.C. Transit Trip Planner](#) or download the Transit App for real-time schedules and route info.
- Greater Victoria also has access to Uber services and taxis.
- There are two popular carshare companies operating in the South Island: [Modo](#) and [Evo](#).

### Driving in B.C.

- Newcomers can drive with an international license for up to 90 days. After that, you must apply for a B.C. driver's license.
- If your country has a reciprocal agreement with B.C., you may be able to exchange your license without testing. Otherwise, you'll need to complete a knowledge test and road test.
- Visit an ICBC Driver Licensing Office with ID, proof of driving experience, and your current license.
- For vehicle registration, visit [ICBC Vehicle Registration](#)
- Full licensing guide: [DriveWise BC – Newcomers](#)

### Ferry Services

- [B.C. Ferries](#): is the main ferry service in British Columbia, connecting Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands with the B.C. mainland. It operates large passenger and vehicle ferries, with major routes running between Vancouver (Tsawwassen and Horseshoe Bay terminals) and Vancouver Island (Victoria/Swartz Bay, Nanaimo, and Duke Point), as well as smaller ferries.

- For residents of B.C., there are occasional discounts and special programs—such as reduced fares for seniors on certain days, experience cards for frequent travel, and seasonal promotions—so it’s worth checking the B.C. Ferries website for the latest offers.
- [Clipper Ferry](#) – The Victoria Clipper is a passenger-only ferry that runs between downtown Victoria and downtown Seattle. It’s a popular option for visitors and offers a scenic, direct ride without needing a car.
- [Coho Ferry](#) – The Black Ball Coho Ferry sails between downtown Victoria and Port Angeles, Washington. It can carry both passengers and vehicles, making it a convenient choice for travelers heading to or from the U.S. Olympic Peninsula.
- [Hullo Ferries](#) – A new passenger ferry service connecting downtown Vancouver and downtown Nanaimo. Hullo Ferries is designed for quick, walk-on travel between the two cities, making day trips and commuting easier.

## 6. Cultural Sensitivity & Indigenous Learning

### Why It Matters

The South Island is home to diverse Indigenous communities, including the Pacheedaht, T'Sou-ke, Scia'new, Songhees, Esquimalt, Tsawout, Tsartlip, Tseycum and Pauquachin First Nations. Understanding and respecting Indigenous history, culture, and perspectives is essential to building meaningful relationships and providing culturally safe care.

### Learning Opportunities

- **San'yas Indigenous Cultural Safety Training**

A self-guided online course focused on anti-racism, colonization, and culturally safe practices in healthcare. Accredited for Mainpro+ credits through the College of Family Physicians of Canada.

[Learn more](#)

- **Doctors of B.C. Indigenous Health Rounds & Learning Series**

Virtual sessions featuring Indigenous voices and teachings for healthcare professionals.

[Explore resources](#)

- **Truth & Reconciliation Curriculum for Newcomers**

Developed by Indigenous educators, this free curriculum introduces newcomers to Indigenous Peoples, their histories, and cultures.

[Access curriculum](#)

## 7. Additional Guides and Supports

### B.C. Newcomers Guide

- The government of B.C. has compiled a [Newcomer Guide](#) with useful links and information to help you and your family as you relocate to beautiful British Columbia.

### Practice as a Physician in B.C. Resource Package

- B.C. Health Careers have created a resource guide for physicians new to B.C., which can be found [here](#):

#### Newcomer Settlement Guides and Websites

New to B.C., the library link for newcomers, has a [wonderful landing page](#) with over 45 guides and websites to help you further with your settlement in B.C.

### B.C. Family Doctors

- B.C. Family Doctors has created a resource guide for residents and new to practice physicians in B.C. which can be found [here](#).

## 8. Clinical Supports

**Rapid Access to Consultative Expertise (RACE):** Online and telephone access for urgent specialist advice within two hours. [More information can be found here.](#)

**Pathways for Clinicians:** Directory of health providers, services, specialist referrals and wait times, and clinical resources. [Pathways for Clinicians](#) (login required).

**PharmaNet:** Check patient eligibility for PharmaCare coverage, prescription costs, and direct billing through third-party insurance. [More info can be found here.](#)

**Westcoast Medical Imaging:** Simple and secure access to patient images and reports from any device. [Westcoast Medical Imaging](#) (need account to access).

**Island Health Electronic Health Records Access:** Access to Island Health Facilities Electronic Health Records ([PowerChart](#), read-only). Please contact [CommunityEHR@islandhealth.ca](mailto:CommunityEHR@islandhealth.ca) for an application.

**Health Connect Registry:** Register to get a family doctor or nurse practitioner. [Register here.](#)



# Contact Us



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