



HIV COMMUNITY LINK

New to Alberta: What You Need to Know

Are you a Person Living with HIV (PLWH) who is new to Alberta and looking for information about local HIV related services and supports? Read on to find answers to some of the most frequently asked questions and important information for PLWH who are new to Calgary and Alberta. With programs in three locations across southern Alberta (Calgary, Medicine Hat and Brooks), HIV Community Link connects new Albertans to the information and services they need.

Receiving HIV Treatment

In Alberta, HIV specific medical services are delivered out of two centres: the Northern Alberta HIV Clinic in Edmonton and the Southern Alberta HIV Clinic in Calgary. In most cases, people who live in the northern region will access services in Edmonton and those in the southern region access services in Calgary. In Calgary, the Southern Alberta Clinic (often called “SAC”) is conveniently located close to the downtown core and public transit at the Sheldon Chumir Health Centre, Room 3223, Third Floor, 1213 4th Street SW.

How Can I Connect with SAC?

PLWH seeking treatment can telephone the clinic directly at (403) 955-6330.

Who Can Receive HIV treatment through SAC?

In order to receive HIV treatment and medications through SAC, you must have provincial or federal health insurance. This is through either the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan (AHCIP) or federal health coverage such as that provided through the Canadian Armed Forces, Correctional Services Canada or Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

Health insurance from other provinces or territories in Canada will not cover the cost of HIV treatment in Alberta. If you are moving to Alberta from another province or territory in Canada, it is strongly recommended that you bring a 3 month supply of HIV treatment from your current location. After 3 months residence in Alberta you will be eligible for AHCIP.

In order for anyone to receive Alberta Health Care Insurance, you must be an *eligible resident of Alberta*. According to Alberta Health, an eligible resident of Alberta is a person who is:

- *Legally entitled to be or to remain in Canada and makes his/her permanent home in Alberta*
- *Committed to being physically present in Alberta for at least 183 days in a 12 month period*

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- *Not claiming residency or obtaining benefits under a claim of residency in another province, territory or country;*
- *Any other person deemed by the regulations to be a resident not including a tourist, transient or visitor to Alberta*

Other types of temporary or permanent residents, students, and workers *may* be eligible for the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan. For more details on who is eligible and how to register, contact us at HIV Community Link or see <http://www.health.alberta.ca/AHCIP/registration-requirements.html> .

What Do I Need for my First Appointment at SAC?

After you first contact SAC, they will make an appointment for you to come into the clinic and meet with the staff.

For your first appointment at SAC you will need photo identification such as a driver's licence, treaty card or passport, as well as your Health Insurance card. If you have applied for Alberta Health Care Insurance, but have not yet received your card in the mail, you can bring your documents from the authorized registry where you submitted your application (see <http://www.health.alberta.ca/AHCIP/registration-locations.html>).

If you were receiving HIV treatment before moving to Alberta, bring a letter from your doctor to confirm your HIV status. It is also helpful to bring a list of any HIV medications you are or were taking before coming to Alberta.

Your first appointment at SAC will involve meeting with the staff and learning about the available services. They will prepare a form for you to take to the laboratory and have blood work done. A follow up appointment will be scheduled for after your laboratory tests are completed.

Most people receiving HIV treatment at SAC will return every 3 or 4 months for follow up and to refill their medications. In some cases, SAC may ship HIV medications to other pharmacies in southern Alberta so you do not need to travel to Calgary as often.

Shipping HIV Medications into Canada from other Countries

We often receive questions about how to have HIV medications imported to Canada for foreign nationals who are visiting and/or working in Canada for longer than 90 days and do not have access to local treatment. For more information on this process, see our Blog *The A Word* at <http://www.hivcl.org/blog/its-not-all-easy-traveling-when-it-comes-to-importing-hiv-meds/>

Finding a Family Doctor

HIV specific treatment and health services are received through SAC, but you will also need a family doctor to attend to your other non-HIV related primary health care needs. There are a number of ways to connect with a family doctor in Alberta and HIV Community Link can assist you with the process:

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- Find a family doctor using an online tool provided by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta <http://www.cpsa.ab.ca/PhysicianSearch/AdvancedSearch.aspx>
- Primary Care Networks (PCNs) are groups of health professionals working together to provide health services in one location. You can register for a local PCN here <https://www.needadoctorcalgaryandarea.ca/Default.aspx> or see a map and listings of all Alberta PCNs here <http://www.pcnpmo.ca/AboutPCNs/PCNsInAlberta/Pages/default.aspx>
- Health Link Alberta is a 24 hour information line that can answer questions about health related issues and help you find a family doctor. Call Health Link Alberta at 1-866-408-5465.

Connecting with HIV Community Link

At HIV Community Link, we provide a number of services and resources to support PLWH in meeting individual goals for wellness and quality of life. Whether you have just been diagnosed with HIV or have been living with HIV for many years, we offer a number of practical services such as counselling, education, advocacy, peer support, housing assistance, workforce skills, nutrition programs, social events and activities, referrals to other agencies, safer sex and safer injecting supplies and much more. We work with clients in-person, in the community and over the phone - whatever you are most comfortable with.

Our drop-in space for clients is open Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 am to 12:00 pm and 1:30pm to 4:00 pm. With plenty of street parking and the Sunalta LRT station only a block away, it is easy to drop in whenever you need to. Our client lounge is always stocked with snacks and coffee. There is a computer with internet access available and you can make an appointment to use our laundry facilities. Our staff are always on site and ready to connect and chat with you. For a full description of our programs see <http://www.hivcl.org/support-services/support-programs>

Getting in Touch

Even if you are not a registered client, our telephone hotline is available during office hours. Feel free to call us with any questions or if you need to talk. Our full menu of services and programs is available to all registered clients. Contact us by phone at (403)508-2500 or email info@hivcl.org

What Can I Expect for my First Visit to HIV Community Link?

Clients are always welcome to stop by during drop-in hours, but it is best to call ahead and book an appointment for your first visit. This way we will be sure to have enough time to answer all your questions and chat about what you may be looking for from us. One of our support staff will start by offering a coffee or tea and invite you into an office where you can speak privately.

Our intakes for new registered clients include some standard information:

- Name, birthdate and Alberta Health number if you have one (this is *not* needed to access services)

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- You will review and sign our confidentiality policy. Client privacy is of utmost importance to us. Under no circumstances (unless dictated by law) are client names, information or details shared. All staff in our agency are bound by confidentiality agreements and client files are restricted to support workers.
- A series of questions will help support staff determine how to best meet your needs. These questions include asking if you have stable housing or have any concerns about mental health or addictions. If you prefer, you can choose not to answer these questions.
- HIV status will need to be confirmed by SAC or another doctor aware of your HIV status. We will ask you to provide permission to have this information sent from your doctor.

Financial and Income Support for PLWH in Alberta

If you are unable to work due to health related issues, our support workers can help you apply for different kinds of financial supports. For PLWH in Alberta, the most common financial supports are Alberta Works and Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH). Most newcomers to Alberta who need these services will first apply for Alberta Works as it can take more than a year to process an AISH application.

To begin applying for Alberta Works, we recommend visiting your nearest office to speak with their staff. You must already be in the province to begin the application process for income supports. For more information contact us at HIV Community Link or see <http://www.informalberta.ca/public/service/serviceProfileStyled.do>

Housing Options

In Calgary, housing can be very expensive and challenging to find. At HIV Community Link we can help you connect with some safe and affordable options including:

- Calgary Housing Company
- Coordinated Access and Assessment Program (Calgary Homeless Foundation)
- The SHARP Foundation
- Various shelters throughout the city

There can be long wait times and application processing for some programs. We recommend getting in touch with us soon if you are experiencing challenges finding housing.

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What are the Laws about Disclosing my HIV Status?

*Note: This information is provided to help you understand laws and regulations around HIV disclosure. This is not legal advice. Legal advice should be sought from a lawyer.

You do not have to tell most people about your HIV status. Examples of people you do *not* have to disclose to include: employers, coworkers, landlords, roommates, service providers, police officers, teachers or daycare workers. However, there are laws and regulations that you must disclose your HIV status to others who may be at what is called *significant risk*. In general, people at significant risk include sexual partners and people with whom you share equipment for injection drug use.

In 2012, the Supreme Court of Canada passed a ruling that says People Living with HIV must disclose their HIV status to all sexual partners *unless* two conditions are met:

- There is a low viral load (less than 1500 copies/ml)
- *AND* a condom is used

The Supreme Court ruling can be applied anywhere in Canada and relates to criminal law. People in violation of these guidelines can be charged with serious criminal offences and face time in prison if convicted.

In Alberta, as in other provinces and territories across Canada, there is also something called the *Public Health Act*. This legislation is different in each province and includes direction on when People Living with HIV must disclose their HIV status. In Alberta, Public Health has established the following:

- PLWH must disclose their status to all insertive sexual partners (anal, vaginal, oral)
- PLWH must use condoms with all insertive sex partners (anal, vaginal, oral)
- PLWH must disclose their status to all shared injection drug use partners

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