

# Gender-Affirming Health Benefits for Indigenous Clients Seeking Care

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For Indigenous individuals seeking gender-affirming care through their benefits plan at First Nations Health Authority, Non-Insured Health Benefits, or their band, the following information may be helpful. As benefits and eligibility may change over time, consider reaching out to the organizations listed below for confirmation of current details.

**NOTE:** Opening this document on a computer should allow you to click web links throughout the document that will take you to the websites and resources mentioned. The website addresses (URLs) are not written on this document due to long URL lengths.

## What's covered through First Nations Health Authority?

**Mental Health:** First Nations Health Authority provides coverage for several options for mental health support, all of which are available for trans and Two-Spirit clients, but are not specific to gender-affirming care. Some of the clinicians listed have experience in working with trans and Two-Spirit clients. You can find more information on available mental health services and clinicians at [First Nations Health Authority](#). Contact a Health Navigator at [Trans Care BC](#) and we can check to see if one of the clinicians in your area is also experienced in providing gender-affirming care.

**Gender-Affirming Items:** Some gender-affirming garments such as binders, packers, dialators, breast forms, gaffs and stand-to-pee devices are covered by [First Nations Health Authority](#). These items must be ordered by a provider and are eligible for coverage up to a pre-set amount. Providers can contact [Express Scripts Canada](#) to confirm client eligibility in the program. Once client eligibility is confirmed and the item is dispensed to the client, providers can submit claims directly to Express Scripts Canada. For general questions, or if your pharmacy does not carry the item you require, you can speak with a [Medical Supply Assessor](#) at First Nations Health Authority.

**Medications:** Any medication that is covered by BC PharmaCare is also covered by First Nations Health Authority (including a wide selection of medications used for hormone replacement therapy such as estrogen, hormone blockers, and testosterone).

Please contact the Health Manager at your band office or a Pharmacy Assessor at First Nations Health Authority to confirm coverage for the medication you have been prescribed. If it is not covered by BC PharmaCare, you can submit a special request for coverage to First Nations Health Authority, these are reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

You may also look up the medication on [BC PharmaCare Formulary Search](#) to find out if it is covered under PharmaCare. Most medications used for hormone replacement therapy require [Special Authority](#).

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**Surgery:** any surgery that is covered by MSP (**many gender-affirming surgeries are covered**) is also covered by First Nations Health Authority.

**Medical Supplies:** there may be some medical supplies such as bandages and anti-septic washes that patients will need when preparing and/or recovering from surgery. These supplies are covered on a case by case basis by First Nations Health Authority. For more information, you can contact the Health Manager at your band office or First Nations Health Authority.

**Travel:** some aspects of gender-affirming care may involve travelling to other communities or urban areas, for instance surgery and hormone readiness assessments. Travel for any medical service (surgery, medical appointment) that is covered through MSP's **Travel Assistance Program** or FNHA's **Patient Travel benefits program** is covered. If the service you require is not covered by MSP or FNHA, you can submit a special request for coverage to First Nations Health Authority. These are reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Travel for medical services may also be covered by your band, and the extent of what is covered (types of services being accessed, who can travel with you, etc.) will vary. Please contact the Health Manager at your band office for more information.

## Eligibility for benefits

Health benefits for Status First Nations people in BC are administered through the **First Nations Health Authority**. For others (specifically belonging to Treaty nations), services are directly covered through the federal **Non-Insured Health Benefits program**. Some health services not covered directly by First Nations Health Authority may still be covered by Non-Insured Health Benefits, or may be covered by **individual bands**. Health Managers at local band offices can be helpful contacts when exploring coverage.

**NOTE for Service Providers:** Being registered or having “status” in First Nations communities is a system imposed by the Indian Act, and has both historically and presently excluded a variety of First Nations people for various reasons. Despite its name, having or being eligible for a status card does not make one person “more” Indigenous than another, as criteria have changed multiple times over the years and can be quite arbitrary and problematic. For these same reasons, you may meet clients who are eligible to obtain a status card, but aren't aware that they meet the criteria.

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**To receive health benefits under the First Nations Health Authority's Health Benefits Program you typically must:**

1. Be a registered 'Indian' according to the Indian Act
2. Be a resident of British Columbia within the meaning of the Medical Service Plan, and
3. Not be funded or insured under any other benefit system or benefit plans provided by:
  - Federal legislation, a federal policy or under agreements entered into by Canada, and/or
  - A First Nations Organization pursuant to self-government agreements, land claim agreements, contribution arrangements or internal policies or plans

## Métis Citizens of BC

Métis Citizens are eligible for counselling and other social service supports through Métis Nation BC (MNBC), such as:

- **The Miyoopimatishihk (Wellbeing) Program** (for children under 8 years): families can apply for financial support to assist in the cost of a range of services, programs and products, including but not limited to: respite care, speech therapy, assessments, specialized equipment and mental health supports.
- **Métis Counselling Connection Program** (all ages): covers the expenses of up to 10, 60-minute counselling sessions provided by registered counsellors, social workers, psychologists or psychiatrists.
  - **Métis Regional Mental Health Navigators** at MNBC can support access to mental health supports in your region.
- **Elders Temporary Financial Support:** MNBC Ministry of Elders is assisting our low-income Métis Citizen Elders/Seniors whose income has been impacted by COVID-19 to obtain groceries, household goods or medications.

For more information on Métis Citizenship, please visit the [Métis Nation BC website](#).

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## Jordan's Principle

**Jordan's Principle** is a legal requirement that applies to First Nations children and may be applied to for consideration of coverage for things like private-pay readiness assessments, fertility treatment, mental health support, post-op supplies and equipment.

The **Jordan's Principle Handbook** provides further details and to access services you can connect with your **local service coordinator**.

## Helpful Contacts

### Trans Care BC

Health Navigators are available to answer questions and connect you with gender-affirming health and wellness supports in BC.

1-866-999-1514 (outside of BC or unable to call a toll-free number: 604-675-3647)

[transcareteam@phsa.ca](mailto:transcareteam@phsa.ca)

<http://www.transcarebc.ca/>

### First Nations Health Authority

Health Benefits Support Representatives can answer most questions, or connect you with the needed assessor (pharmacy, medical supply, travel, etc).

1-800-317-7878

[healthbenefits@fnha.ca](mailto:healthbenefits@fnha.ca)

<http://www.fnha.ca/benefits>