

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Access to health care for uninsured and precarious status migrants in Hamilton



Disclaimer: Every effort has been made to verify the content in this handbook. However, service provision is dynamic and the content in this book may not always be up-to-date. *Call ahead!* If you notice an error, please send an e-mail to ruth.chiu@medportal.ca.

This handbook was originally created by Health for All Toronto. Its content was adapted to the Hamilton context in July 2017 by OHIP for All, with support from the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council (HIPC). The Know Your Rights section for uninsured pregnant women was developed by Manavi Handa, Registered Midwife, Assistant Professor at Ryerson University.

To access the province-wide version of this handbook, visit www.ohipforall.ca.

1. ACCESSING BASIC HEALTH CARE (ALSO KNOWN AS PRIMARY HEALTH CARE)

What does “primary health care” mean?

Primary care is a broad term used in Canada to describe health services provided in the community. This includes diagnosis, treatment and management of health problems, as well as disease prevention and health promotion services. Primary care providers are often an individual’s first point of contact with the health care system.

If you do not have health insurance, you have a right to access **Community Health Centres (CHCs)** free of charge, regardless of ability to provide a health card. CHCs can see people without OHIP for doctor appointments, tests, and specialist visits. To find a CHC near you, call 416-236-2539. Here is a list of the CHCs and other primary care providers that serve uninsured clients in Hamilton:

Hamilton Urban Core CHC

www.hucchc.com

71 Rebecca Street

Mon 9-5, Tues 9-8, Weds 12:30-5, Thurs 9-8.

Also open on the 3rd Friday (9-5) and Saturday (9-1) of every month.

Call 905-522-3233 to make an appointment

North Hamilton CHC

www.nhchc.ca

438 Hughson Street North

Mon 8-5, Tues-Thurs 8-8, Fri 8-4.

Call 905-523-6611 to make an appointment

Centre de Santé Communautaire

www.cschn.ca

***For French-speaking clients**

1320 Barton Street East

Mon, Weds, Thurs, Fri 9-4 and Tues 9-8.

Call 905-528-0163 to make an appointment

Refuge: Hamilton Centre for Newcomer Health

www.newcomerhealth.ca

***For new immigrants and refugees**

183 Hughson Street, Lower Level

Administrative hours: Mon-Fri 9:30-2:30.

Evening/weekend clinic times also available.

Call 905-526-0000 to make an appointment

Shelter Health Network

www.shelterhealthnetwork.ca

***For clients who do not have stable housing**

Various locations across Hamilton. Visit www.shelterhealthnetwork.ca/?page_id=759 for monthly clinic schedule.

Walk-in or by appointment (call 905-526-7137 to make an appointment)

*Note: Some health centres have budgets set aside for professional translators if you are more comfortable speaking in a language other than English. If you have an appointment, call in advance to see whether translation services are available.

Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Telehealth Ontario is a free, confidential telephone service you can call to get health advice or general health information from a registered nurse. You do not need a health insurance number to call, nor do you need to provide any personal contact information if you do not want to. Translation support is available in multiple languages.

Visit www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/telehealth/ for more information.

2. ACCESSING SEXUAL HEALTH CARE

Primary health care services can provide sexual health care. There are also health clinics that are more specific to sexual health services. Regardless of your immigration status, you can visit a Hamilton Public Health sexual health clinic for:

- Sexual health, safer sex practices, abstinence and birth control information
- Low cost birth control, free condoms, and free emergency contraceptive pill
- Free urine pregnancy testing
- Free testing for chlamydia, gonorrhoea, hepatitis, syphilis, herpes and HIV
- Free treatment for chlamydia, gonorrhoea, HPV and syphilis
- Free Hepatitis A and B vaccines, needle exchange, and harm reduction supplies

You do not need a referral or OHIP to visit Hamilton Public Health sexual health clinics. The following clinics are open to **walk-in clients**:

Downtown Clinic

100 Main Street West, 3rd floor
Weds 4:30-7 pm. 905-528-5894

East End (Stoney Creek) Clinic

247 Centennial Parkway North, Unit 8.
Mon 12:30-4, Thurs 3-6 pm. 905-546-3750

Mountain Clinic

891 Upper James Street, Unit 106A.
Mon 3-6, Weds 12:30-4 pm. 905-546-3274

Waterdown Clinic

315 Dundas Street East, 2nd Floor.
Tues 3-6 pm. 905-528-5894

*Note: Clients must register 15 minutes before the clinics close in order to be seen. Visit www.hamilton.ca/public-health/clinicservices/sexual-health-clinics for more information about available services.

Other sexual health supports:

Hamilton Sexual Health Information Line

905-528-5894 (Mon-Fri 8:30 am-4:30 pm)
Free, confidential phone counselling with a Public Health Nurse regarding safer sex, abstinence, birth control, sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS and clinic services.

SACHA Sexual Assault Centre

905-525-4162 (24/7 phone support)
75 MacNab Street South (Mon-Fri 9 am-5 pm), walk-in or by appointment (call 905-525-4573 to make an appointment).
Free support for victims of sexual violence, which includes sexual assault, childhood sexual abuse or sexual harassment. Services include individual and group counselling, advocacy and accompaniment, and practical assistance. Visit www.sacha.ca for more information.

AIDS and Sexual Health Infoline

1-800-668-2437 (Mon-Fri 10 am-10:30 pm, Sat-Sun 11 am-3 pm)
Free, confidential phone counselling in different languages. Staff provide information on HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, safer sex activities, birth control options, sexuality and relationship concerns, pregnancy and options, and injection drug use and needle exchange. Counsellors can also refer to appropriate clinics and community agencies.

3. ACCESSING PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

All residents of Hamilton, regardless of immigration status, are entitled to Hamilton Public Health Services (PHS). Many programs, services and materials are available in multiple languages. Visit www.hamilton.ca/public-health for up-to-date information on available services. Current services include:

Programs for Children & Pregnant Women

- Health Connections Phone Line: 905-546-3550 (Mon-Fri 8:30-4:30). Free phone support for pregnant parents and families with children under 6 on topics such as pregnancy, breastfeeding, safety, nutrition, postpartum depression and programs and services in Hamilton.
- Healthy Babies Healthy Children: Free educational home visits to support child development and link families to community resources. Interpretation available. Call 905-546-3550 for more information.
- Hamilton Prenatal Nutrition Project: Free educational support groups for pregnant women. Child-minding, bus tickets and grocery gift cards are provided. Call 905-546-3550 or visit www.hamilton.ca/prenatalgroups for more information.
- Nutrition Sessions for Babies & Children: Free nutrition sessions on feeding babies and children. For information on how to register, visit www.hamilton.ca/public-health/clinics-services/feeding-your-baby-children.

Dental Services

The City of Hamilton offers free dental care for residents who have a low income and do not have dental insurance. Services include:

- The Dental Health Bus: Drop-in; see www.hamilton.ca/public-health/clinics-services/dental-health-bus for bus schedule.
- PHS Dental Clinic: For adults meeting certain criteria (application required); call 905-546-2424 x3789 or visit www.hamilton.ca/public-health/clinics-services/public-health-services-dental-clinic for more information, including details on how to apply.
- Children's Preventive Dental Clinic: By appointment (call 905-546-2424 x3566 to make an appointment); visit www.hamilton.ca/publichealth/clinics-services/public-health-serviceschildrens-preventive-dental-clinic for more information. Information about other free or low cost dental services can be found at www.hamilton.ca/publichealth/clinics-services/free-or-low-cost-dentalprograms-hamilton-residents.

Harm Reduction Programs

- Street Health Clinics: Provide many services such as testing for sexually transmitted infections, needle syringe supplies and overdose prevention kits - Wesley Centre (195 Ferguson Avenue North. Mon, Weds, Fri 9-1); Notre Dame House (Youth aged 16-21 only. 14 Cannon Street West. Tues 3:30-5:30).
- Other PHS harm reduction services include overdose prevention kits and needle syringe supply/disposal (at fixed sites and via the mobile Van program), and treatment for drug/alcohol problems. Call 905-546-3606 or visit www.hamilton.ca/public-health/clinics-services/alcohol-drug-and-gambling-clinicsprograms for more information.
- Further harm reduction services can also be accessed through CHCs and the Shelter Health Network (see under Primary Care).

Vaccinations

For information about vaccinations, to report vaccinations for children, or to find out where vaccinations can be obtained, call 905-540-5250 or visit www.hamilton.ca/vaccines.

Other free health services available to uninsured clients:

EatRight Ontario

1-877-510-5102 (Mon-Fri 9-5)
Free phone support from a registered dietician.

Head Lice Bug Buster Clinics

905-546-2489
Provide free head lice services for children and their families.

Quitting Smoking

Hamilton PHS (905-546-2424 x3788, www.hamilton.ca/public-health/clinics-services/quitting-smoking-clinicsprograms) provides free support and nicotine replacement therapy for smokers. The Canadian Cancer Society Smokers' Helpline (1-877-513-5333) also provides free phone support for people hoping to quit smoking (interpretation available).

Bed Bugs

If you live in rental housing, report the bed bugs to your landlord, as he/she is responsible for providing pest control services.
Call PHS (905-546-2489) for questions or if your landlord refuses to have the pests treated by a licensed pest control operator.

4. ACCESSING HEALTHCARE IN PREGNANCY

Midwifery care is free (no cost) for any woman who is a resident of Ontario. It does not matter what your immigration status is, as long as you are a resident of Ontario.

Finding a midwife

There are four midwifery groups in Hamilton: The Hamilton Midwives (905-527-8919), Community Midwives of Hamilton (905-546-5444), Access Midwives (905-546-5002) and Mountain Midwifery Care (905-296-3665). To find a midwife in other areas of Ontario, visit www.aommembersonly.ca/find_a_midwife/Search.aspx.

Care during pregnancy (“prenatal care”)

- Midwives can care for women and order all necessary tests in a healthy, normal pregnancy – but pregnant women may need to pay for these tests.
- Midwives in Ontario offer both home and hospital birth to their clients – if you have your baby in a hospital, you will be asked to pay the hospital fees. Different hospitals in the city charge different rates for uninsured patients. You might want to call a few hospitals to find out which ones have cheaper rates.
- Research has shown that homebirth with a midwife is a very safe option for low-risk women (women with no health problems, or pregnancy related concerns). There are NO costs to having your baby at home with a midwife and research shows that women and babies who have a normal pregnancy are just as healthy with home birth with a midwife in Canada as they are if they give birth in the hospital.
- **In addition to midwives, uninsured patients can go to community health centres and other primary care providers to get care while they are pregnant (see above under Primary Care).**

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Paying for care in hospitals (during pregnancy and in labour)

When you are actually in labour or have another medical emergency, the hospital or doctor cannot refuse to care for you, even if you do not have any money. The hospital and doctor will bill you for the care they provide, but they will still provide you with the care you need in an emergency.

- The hospital may take you to a collection agency to collect the fees you owe them for any amount of time you stayed in the hospital. If they take you to a collection agency, this can affect your credit rating and ability to get a loan in the future.
- Most hospitals will let you pay them in small amounts (even \$50 a month) instead of taking you to a collection agency – sometimes it is better to try to work this out with the hospital finance department instead of waiting until they go to a collection agency.
- Many hospitals will not end up making you pay the full fee if they see that you can even pay part of it (e.g. half the fee). Doctors are unlikely to take you to a collection agency to collect their fee.
- **Canadian-born children to uninsured mothers have full access to OHIP and are eligible to receive a health insurance card.**

If your newborn baby needs to stay in hospital...

Even if your baby needs to stay in the hospital because it is sick, you might not have to stay in the hospital as a patient if you are healthy - this can save you costs of having to stay in the hospital.

- Many hospitals have 'sleeping rooms' where parents can stay for one or two days if their baby is in the nursery. These sleeping rooms mean you are not a patient, but you can stay to help care for your baby (e.g. breastfeed).
- If you stay in a sleeping room, you do not need to pay. You can only stay in the sleeping room for 1 or 2 days if it is free. If your baby needs to stay in the hospital you might not be able to stay.

5.ACCESSING EMERGENCY HEALTH CARE

You cannot be refused emergency medical care based on your ability to provide a health card. You will however be billed by the hospital. Rates vary at different hospitals for uninsured patients.

Accessing a translator/interpreter in hospital

- All hospitals in Ontario should have access to translation services via telephone although not all health care providers will know how to access such services. If you require translation services, ask your health care provider about telephone translation services.

Paying for your hospital visit

- Even if you don't receive a bill at the time of your discharge from hospital, you may be sent a bill in the mail. Many hospitals have an equity/diversity office. Ask to speak with them as they may be able to help you negotiate payment in installments with the hospital's finance department. Ask them to bill you as a medically uninsured "Ontario resident" as opposed to a medically uninsured traveller. Hospitals are not required to do this, but they may oblige if you ask.
- Hospitals may take you to a collection agency if you are unable to pay for your hospital fees. In many cases, it is better to try to negotiate payment of some portion of the fees than to wait for a bill to be sent to you that will go unpaid and subsequently will be followed up by a collection agency. Again, if they take you to a collection agency it may affect your credit rating and your ability to apply for loans, a credit card, a cellular phone etc. in the future.