

Nisga'a Valley Health Authority

Medical Transportation Health Benefits Schedule

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Medical Transportation Benefit Schedule (MTBS)

Revised June 2023

1. Purpose and Scope of This Document

The Nisga'a Health Benefits Program manages the Medical Transportation Benefit (MTB), which is administered by the Nisga'a Valley Health Authority (NVHA) on behalf of the Nisga'a Nation. The purpose of this document is to provide details about the policies, eligibility, criteria, and rates for the MTB. This document replaces previous Non-Insured Health Benefits Medical Transportation Policy documents.

The MTBS applies to all Medical Transportation Benefits administered directly by the NVHA.

2. Medical Transportation Benefit Coverage

The Medical Transportation Benefit provides financial support when a client is accessing medically necessary health services not available in the client's community of residence (see 8. Definitions). This support may include coverage towards the cost of transportation, meals, and accommodation as well as travel for an escort if needed.

Medical Transportation benefits cover the most efficient and economical means of travel, considering the urgency of the situation and the client's medical condition. Clients are responsible for attending appointments on time and being punctual for travel arrangements, as well as organizing and safekeeping documentation. Please see Appendix A for complete information on clients' responsibilities.

2.1. Criteria for Coverage

2.1.1. Who is Eligible?

The following individuals are eligible for Medical Transportation Benefits:

- People with Nisga'a citizenship who reside in Canada.
- Registered members of one of the four Nisga'a Indian Bands who reside in Canada.

- Infants up to 24 months of age with an eligible parent.

2.1.2. Eligible Medical Services

Medical Travel Benefits cover travel to access medically necessary in-person health service(s) including:

- Medical services insured through the BC Medical Services Plan.
- Publicly funded diagnostic tests and preventative screening programs.
- Traditional healers, if approved as an exception.
- Travel to a treatment centre for substance use.
- Opioid agnostic therapy.
- Services eligible under the Health Benefits Program including dental, vision care medical supplies and equipment, and mental health.

2.1.3. General Criteria

Travel requests must meet all the following criteria to be approved:

- The service(s) is not available in the client's community of residence.
- The service(s) is to the closest appropriate health professional acting within their scope of practice or facility.
- There is a written confirmation of a scheduled in-person appointment.
- Coverage is not available through other publicly funded health or social programs, such as ICBC or WorkSafe BC or any private insurance.
- Travel that does not meet the above criteria will not be covered by the Medical Transportation Benefit.

2.2. Transportation

Coverage will be provided for the most efficient and economical mode of transportation, taking into consideration the urgency of the situation and the client's medical condition. Travel must be arranged in such a way that the client can attend their appointment and return home by the earliest appropriate means.

2.2.1. Private Vehicle

The following situations are eligible for mileage coverage at the established rate (see Appendix B, Approved Medical Transportation Rate Schedule):

- The most appropriate mode of transportation is a private vehicle.
- A private vehicle is used to travel to a transportation terminal that is located outside of the client's community of residence.
- An Elder is reliant on mobility aids.

Ineligible:

- Additional costs related to hiring a driver, car rental, or vehicle wear and tear.
- Any travel within the destination city, including between the client's accommodation and scheduled appointment.

2.2.2. Taxis

Taxi coverage may be provided for travel between the transportation terminal in the destination city and the client's booked accommodation, as well as between the clients' accommodation and medical appointment.

Clients travelling in private vehicles are not eligible for taxi coverage.

2.2.3. Coordinated Travel

If the client has multiple appointments within a short period of time, or if members of the same household are travelling to the same destination, travel should be coordinated to reduce the number of trips.

For multiple clients travelling to appointments in the same vehicle, reimbursement will be granted to only one client at the established mileage rate.

2.2.4. Community Vehicles

Clients living in communities where there is a medical van or vehicle available for medical travel should coordinate medical appointments with regularly scheduled van trips.

Where a community vehicle is available to access medical necessary health services and a client chooses not to use this service, private vehicle mileage coverage will not be approved.

2.2.5. Regular Repeated Travel

Clients who need to travel repeatedly (twice or more per week) on a long-term basis to access medically necessary health services may receive Medical Transportation Benefits for up to four months.

Regular repeated travel beyond four months must be approved through the exceptions process (see Section 4 for exceptions).

2.2.6. Seasonal Travel

During the winter season (November 1st – March 31st), clients who are elders (aged 65 or older) who are travelling to appointments for services outside of their community of residence occurring before 11 a.m. may receive benefits for accommodations and meals.

2.3. Meals

The Medical Transportation Benefit supplements the cost of meals in accordance with the approved meal rate schedule.

Clients travelling for less than six hours may still be eligible for the day trip meal benefit if they have a medical condition that requires regular meals, such as diabetes or pregnancy.

Clients who are travelling for more than six nights should be booked into accommodation with cooking facilities and given the weekly meal rate for groceries.

See Appendix B for the Meal Rate Schedule.

2.4. Accommodation

Medical Transportation Benefits are provided for overnight accommodation on a

case-by-case basis. Coverage is based on medical justification, time of appointment, distance travelled, location of accommodation, and schedule of coordinated transportation.

Arrangements for accommodation will be made by NHB.

- Clients who choose to make different accommodation arrangements may seek reimbursement but will be responsible for any difference in cost.
- Not-for-profit accommodation such as the Easter Seals or Cancer Lodge must be used whenever possible.
- Accommodation for minors accessing treatment at BC Children's Hospital or Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children should be arranged through the BC Family Residence Program.
- NHB will not cover any incidental fees incurred by the client.

See Appendix B for a guide to nightly rates.

2.4.1. Accommodation in a Private Home

Clients who choose accommodation in a private home will be reimbursed in accordance with the approved private accommodation nightly rate.

See Appendix B for current rates.

2.4.2. Long-Term or Extended Stays

- Clients approved for more than six nights should have accommodation booked with cooking facilities and provided the weekly meal rate (to purchase groceries for the client and escort, if utilized);
- Extended stays where the client is required to remain close to a treatment facility outside their community of residence must be submitted as an exception and may be covered for up to a three-month transition period only.

2.5. Travelling Providers

When a health professional (e.g., GP/doctor, dentist, etc.), is brought into the community to provide services, the community facility is considered the closest

facility. Travel outside the community to access similar services may only be considered if medical documentation indicates that the urgency of the client's medical condition makes it inappropriate to wait for a travelling provider.

2.6. Traditional Healing

Travel to a traditional healer may be approved as an exception under the following criteria (for exceptions see Section 4):

- The traditional healer is recognized as such by the community or NVHA.
- The traditional healer is located on Nisga'a Lands where the client currently resides; and
- The client has a medical condition confirmed, in writing, by a licensed physician or community health professional for which the traditional healer will provide care.

Travel to bring a traditional healer into the community may be approved. The NHB program does not cover the honoraria, ceremonial expenses, and medicines from traditional healers.

2.7. Travel to a FNHA/ Nisga'a-Funded Treatment Centre for Substance Use

Travel may be covered to a FNHA/Nisga'a-funded treatment centre for substance use (formerly National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program) or FNHA/NVHA-referred facility when a client has written confirmation of acceptance from the treatment centre.

Travel for trips home or family visits to the treatment facility during treatment are not eligible unless they are considered part of the treatment plan as established by the facility and approved prior to starting treatment.

Return travel back to the client's community of residence will be covered regardless of whether the treatment was completed.

2.8. Travel Escorts

Medical transportation coverage may be available for an escort when a client

requires support to access medically necessary health services. Escort coverage is provided for the appropriate length of time the escort is required, based on the client's health, medical condition, and legal requirements.

For coverage for an escort to be approved, the appropriate travel request must be submitted before the start of the trip.

The payment of a fee, honorarium, or salary to an escort is not an eligible benefit under the medical transportation benefit.

2.8.1. Eligibility for Escort Coverage Without Additional Documentation

Clients that meet any of the following conditions may receive escort coverage without submitting additional documentation:

- The client is a minor (under the age of 19).
- The client is an elder (65 or older).
- The client is travelling for prenatal care or to be near medical care while awaiting childbirth.
- The client is travelling for cancer-related appointments.
- There is an existing record that explains the continued need for an escort.

2.8.2. Eligibility for Escort Coverage with Additional Documentation

Clients that meet any of the following conditions and provide written documentation from a physician, nurse, or nurse practitioner that demonstrates their need for an escort may receive coverage:

- The client has a physical or mental disability and requires assistance with activities of daily living (e.g., dressing, eating, bathing, etc.).
- The client faces a language barrier.
- The client will receive instructions on specific and essential home medical or nursing procedures that cannot be given to the client only.
- The client is undergoing a medical procedure (e.g., day surgery) or has a medical condition that results in the client requiring assistance during the trip.

2.8.3. Escorts for Clients in Hospital

An escort's travel costs may be covered for clients who are in the care of a hospital or long-term facility for more than three days, or an indeterminate period (for example, Medevac).

Escorts should be booked in accommodation with kitchen facilities and provided the weekly meal rate.

2.8.4. Who Can Travel as an Escort?

Individuals must meet the following criteria to travel as an escort:

- Be a legal adult who can sign consent forms, when necessary.
- Be capable of caring for themselves and the client throughout the duration of the medical travel.
- Be capable of translating between the client's language and English, when necessary.
- Be able to share personal space, including accommodation, to support the client.
- Be able to support the client getting to or from their appointments.

2.9. Ambulance Bills

The Health Benefits Program covers the cost of ambulance transport services in the following situations:

- Transport to hospital in an emergency
- Transport from a lower-level care facility to a higher-level care facility
- Transport between two hospitals

Ambulance coverage is based on the rules and rates set out by the Provincial Emergency Health Services. Coverage for ambulance transport services from the hospital back to the home may be covered as an exception.

Ambulance transport services are paid directly by NHB.

2.10. Reimbursements for Out-of-Pocket Expenses

Clients who have paid out of pocket for expenses that are eligible for Medical Transportation Benefits can apply for reimbursement. Clients are to submit reimbursement requests within 12 months of the date of the scheduled appointment. The Nisga'a Health Benefits Program will reimburse up to the benefit limits outlined in this document.

3. Exceptions

The following types of travel must be processed through the exception process and may require supporting documentation:

- Escort coverage if the client is in the care of a hospital or care facility for an indeterminate period.
- Travel to be fitted for medical supplies or equipment covered by NVHA when the fitting cannot take place in the community of residence.
- Travel to a traditional healer.
- Regular repeated travel beyond six months.
- Ambulance transport services from hospital back to the home.
- Travel to a non-NVHA affiliated treatment centre.
- Special diet restriction meal rate.
- Coverage for a 2nd escort.
- Elder travel between municipalities within the Metro Vancouver Regional District

4. Exclusions

Exclusions from the Medical Transportation Benefit include, but are not limited to:

- Compassionate travel to visit a family member or loved one.
- Local travel within the client's community of residence.
- Travel back to a client's community of residence if the client becomes ill while away from home other than on medical travel.
- Travel to pick up prescriptions (for Opioid Agonist Therapy, see 3.3.5. Regular Repeated Travel)
- Travel for clients who are in the care of a federal, provincial, or territorial institution, such as clients who are incarcerated.
- Travel to access court-ordered treatment/assessment or a condition of parol

that is arranged by the justice system.

- Travel to day care or respite care.
- Travel to medical appointments when travelling outside of Canada.
- Incidental accommodation fees beyond the cost of the room and applicable taxes.
- Payment of fees for doctor's notes in support of a client accessing Medical Transportation Benefits.
- Payment of fees, honorarium, or salary to an escort.

Exclusions are not eligible for coverage through the Health Benefits Exceptions or Health Benefits Appeals process.

5. Appeals Process

Health Benefits clients, their parent/guardian, or their representative have the right to appeal a decision made by the Health Benefits Program. An appeal can be submitted up to 12 months from the date that the benefit was denied. For information on how to submit an appeal, visit the NVHA website.

6. Personal Information and Privacy

The NVHA is a non-profit society that is governed by the BC Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA) and other applicable legislation. The NVHA only collects, uses, and discloses personal information on a need-to-know basis to administer NVHA business, programs, or activities when permitted or authorized under PIPA. We do not collect, use, or disclose more personal information than is required to fulfil those purposes. Protecting clients' personal information is our priority, and all personal information is kept strictly confidential in accordance with our shared vision, values, and directives.

7. Definitions

Community of Residence: a client's community of residence is the municipality where they live unless they live in the Metro Vancouver Regional District. All municipalities in Metro Vancouver are considered one single community. Any travel within Metro Vancouver is considered local travel. The Medical Transportation Benefit provides coverage outside of the client's municipality of residence.

FNHA-Funded Treatment Centre for Substance Use: In British Columbia, the First Nations Health Authority funds residential treatment centres. These treatment centres offer a variety of cultural and clinical interventions and support for First Nations people in BC. Services offered at treatment facilities vary but include family treatment, couples counselling, and services to clients with physical disabilities and concurrent disorders, clients on Opioid Agonist Therapy, pregnant women, and clients on psychoactive medications.

Health Benefits Exception(s): items, services, or travel that are not defined benefits, but which may be approved with the appropriate justification.

Health Benefits Exclusion(s): items, services, or travel that will not be covered under the Nisga'a Health Benefits Program under any circumstances and are not subject to the Health Benefits Exception process or the Health Benefits Appeals process.

Medical Transportation Exception: Specific types of travel where the request for coverage must be reviewed by the Nisga'a Health Benefits Medical Transportation staff.

Nisga'a Health Benefit Client(s): people who meet the criteria as described in the Health Services Delivery Agreement between Nisga'a Valley Health Authority and the Nisga'a Nation.

Opioid Agonist Treatment (OAT): OAT is the first-line recommended option prescribed for someone diagnosed with opioid use disorder. It can be an effective way to avoid the acute symptoms of opioid withdrawal and find a pathway to hope and healing. It works by replacing short-acting opioids with longer-acting opioid medication. The two most common OAT medications are methadone and buprenorphine/naloxone.

APPENDIX A: CLIENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Contact NHB Well in Advance of Travel

- ❖ When possible, clients must provide at least five days' notice prior to travelling to access medically necessary services to allow time for travel arrangements to be made. Without enough notice, clients may have to reschedule their appointment, or pay for their travel up front and seek reimbursement later.
- ❖ Clients must get prior approval from NHB for all non-emergency medical trips.

Avoid Missing Appointments and Travel

- ❖ Clients must attend their medical appointments as scheduled. Not attending medical appointments as scheduled may impact future medical transportation coverage and in some cases, clients will be required to pay for their travel costs on subsequent medical travel and then submit reimbursement requests.
- ❖ Clients who miss scheduled and arranged travel and accommodations may be required to pay back any benefits they have received and may be required to make their own travel arrangements home and pay for their travel costs on subsequent medical travel.
- ❖ Clients must give as much notice as possible when cancelling an appointment. Clients must provide at least 24-hour notice when cancelling hotel or flight arrangements.

Keep Track of Paperwork

- ❖ Clients need to get a signed or stamped confirmation from the health professional or facility that they attended and provide it to NHB.
- ❖ Clients must protect all original warrants or vouchers given to them for their medical trip as they cannot be replaced if lost or stolen.

- ❖ Clients must keep all receipts associated with their medical transportation travel so that they can be submitted for reimbursement.

Maintain Respectful Behaviour

- ❖ Clients must not use threatening or verbally abusive language towards patient travel clerks or providers. Such behaviour will not be tolerated and may result in clients being asked to pay for their travel upfront and request reimbursement later.

APPENDIX B: APPROVED MEDICAL TRANSPORTATION RATE SCHEDULE

MILEAGE	PER KILOMETER	\$00.53
Meals	Breakfast	\$20.00
	Lunch	\$25.00
	Dinner	\$30.00
	Full day, when travel extends overnight	\$75.00
	Weekly, when travelling more than 6 days	\$260.00
	Special diet, on exception approval	\$300.00
Accomodation	Metro Vancouver hotel (off peak/peak season)	\$150/300
	Vancouver Island	\$125/200
	Other cities	\$125/150
	Private, per night	\$90.00
	Private, max. per week	\$450.00



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Health Authority**