
Open letter to the BC government: End the three-month wait for immigrants to receive health care insurance

On the eve of International Migrants Day, research suggests the need for BC government to provide health insurance for all, regardless of immigration status or ability to pay

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: *Friday, December 17, 2021* On the eve of International Migrants Day, the Centre for Gender & Sexual Health Equity at the University of British Columbia, along with community partner Sanctuary Health, sent an open letter to the BC government sharing our new research highlighting the need for the immediate repeal of a policy that forces immigrants to BC to wait three months for health insurance. The research, affirming longstanding community concerns, confirms the urgent need for this policy to be amended or repealed immediately. The open letter follows on the heels of a [petition](#) urging the government to abolish the policy, signed by almost 400 individuals and groups.

The open letter, signed by unions, civil liberties organizations, and advocacy groups, was published today in the *Burnaby Beacon*. It points to a growing body of research that exposes the serious harms caused by the mandatory wait period policy, particularly to immigrant women and their children. “[Our research](#) shows that this policy causes substantial and sometimes devastating health consequences, specifically for infants, children, people of colour and during pregnancy,” said Dr. Shira Goldenberg, CGSHE Research Scientist and UBC Affiliate Faculty in Medicine. “Forcing people to wait for health care **worsens health inequities** and ultimately **increases health spending**, costing **more** than if coverage were provided to immigrants on arrival. Not only is it unjust, it doesn’t make any sense.” Dr. Goldenberg is a co-lead of the UBC [Evaluating Inequities in Refugee & Immigrant Women’s Sexual Health Access](#) housed at CGSHE.

Because of this policy, new immigrants in BC are often forced to make agonizing choices between food and housing, or health care coverage for themselves or their sick children. One woman described spending her family’s last few hundred dollars on a doctor’s visit and medication for her very ill child, leaving them with nowhere to sleep and little money for food. Another told of hearing her daughter cry out in pain at night. “I would cry with her until the morning. The doctors were refusing to see her. Coming to Canada had become a negative experience for me because I was worried about losing my daughter.”

Omar Chu, of Sanctuary Health, called the mandatory wait period “deeply xenophobic” and an affront to universal health care, noting that BC is only one of two provinces that still has such a policy. “It **violates multiple international human rights conventions** and is in stark contrast to Canada’s commitment to universally accessible and inclusive health care,” he said. “We **urgently call on the Ministry of Health and the Medical Services Commission to immediately and permanently repeal this policy** and end the wait for health insurance for all residents coming from outside of Canada.

[Click here](#) to read the **open letter**.

[Click here](#) for CGSHE’s **key findings & urgent policy recommendations**.

[Click here](#) to read CGSHE’s **peer-reviewed journal article**.

[Click here](#) for Sanctuary Health’s **policy study**.

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About the Centre for Gender & Sexual Health Equity: *The Centre for Gender & Sexual Health Equity is a UBC and SFU academic centre housed at Providence Health. The CGSHE's mission is to provide leadership in gender equity and sexual health for all in BC, Canada and globally, through rigorous community-engaged research that meets the highest scientific and ethical standards, evidence-based policy development, and fostering the implementation of innovative, patient-centred and equity-oriented clinical and community practices through guidelines and education. CGSHE is located on the unceded traditional territories of the x^wməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlílwətaʔ (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.*

About the IRIS Project: Evaluating Inequities in Refugee & Immigrant Women's Sexual Health Access.

About Sanctuary: *Sanctuary Health is a grassroots community group that deploys a wide range of strategies to advocate for access to services for all regardless of immigration status or documentation. Sanctuary Health is committed to building cross-sectoral alliances of mutual support to advance the migrant-justice movement on unceded Coast Salish territories.*