

# Empowering the Citizen Patient

Actionable Tips, Information & Resources to Support  
Your Health & Health Care

## Article #10

Healthy People, Healthy Communities  
**Accessing Care if You  
Don't Have a Family Practitioner**



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*In this, the tenth of our Empowering the Citizen patient series, Dr. Mindy Smith, a retired family physician and now a member of the Patient Advisory Committee and Community in the Kootenay Boundary, shares insights and resources for unattached patients—those without a family doctor or nurse practitioner. Dr. Smith emphasizes the challenges faced by rural communities and the importance of utilizing available resources to ensure comprehensive healthcare.*

## Navigating Healthcare as an Unattached Patient

As a retired family physician and member of our community, I have witnessed firsthand the difficulties many face in accessing consistent and reliable healthcare. These challenges are not unique to our region, but are prevalent across Canada. Provider shortages, long wait times, and limited access to health services can leave many without a primary care provider.

For those of us in rural areas like Kootenay Boundary (KB), these issues are often magnified. We may live hours away from the nearest healthcare facility or face long appointment waits. These challenges can be daunting, but it's crucial to remember that there are resources and support systems available to help us navigate these difficulties so that we receive the care and support needed to maintain our health and well-being. For those of us in rural areas like Kootenay Boundary (KB), these issues are often magnified.

A graphic with a light green background. On the left, an orange oval contains the text "LOOKING FOR A FAMILY DOCTOR OR NURSE PRACTITIONER?" in white, bold, uppercase letters. To the right of the oval is a circular inset image of a smiling female healthcare professional in blue scrubs with a stethoscope. Below the oval and image, the text "Please follow the link below for more information on help available to access the care you need." is written in a dark grey font. At the bottom, a dark teal button with the text "Learn More" in white is centered.

### Step 1: Register with KB's Health Connect Registry

The [Health Connect Registry](#) is the most efficient way to find a family doctor or nurse practitioner in the region. Once registered, you'll be contacted directly when a primary care provider is available.

Patients who self-identify as Aboriginal are encouraged to reach out to the [Circle of Indigenous Nations Society](#) (1-877-904-2634) to reach an [Aboriginal Health Coordinator](#) or the [Aboriginal Patient Navigator](#). The [Aboriginal Health Coordinator and Patient Navigator](#) provide culturally-based supports, accompaniment and health system advocacy. Some excellent health resources can be found on the [www.kbculturalsafety.org/patients](http://www.kbculturalsafety.org/patients) website.



## Virtual and In-Person Care Options

For less urgent health care needs, start by calling [2-1-1](#) ([bc.211.ca](http://bc.211.ca)). This service, operated by United Way BC Helpline Services connects people to community, government, and social services, offering assistance with basic needs, mental health support, legal and financial help, and support for seniors and newcomers to the region. And for health advice, call [8-1-1](#) to speak to a health service navigator.

Talk to a 211 Navigator 24/7:

Call Chat Text Email Search

For emergencies, call 9-1-1 instead.

**211 by United Way BC.**  
**Connect with the help you need. Free. Confidential. 24/7.**

New to 211? See how we help →

Locally, in-person urgent care is available at Castlegar Urgent & Primary Care Centre ([UPCC](#)) by phoning to book an appointment at [\(250\) 304-1289](#) (open 8 a.m. – 8 p.m., 7 days a week). Patients can also access physiotherapy and social work services at the UPCC through self-referral which may be covered by MSP.

A new clinic called KB Access (<https://kbaccess.ca>) opened in January 2025 that specifically supports patients in the KB who are without a family practitioner. They are located in Nelson but offer both virtual and in-person services to all patients in the KB region from 9 am to noon Monday to Friday. You can book an appointment through their website or by calling [\(778\) 508-3112](#).

To support patients with no clinician in the Lower Columbia region, a community-led non-profit clinic with team-based care encompassing a range of healthcare professionals is projected to open in Summer 2025 (<https://www.lowercolumbiachc.ca/>).

Other province-wide virtual care options covered by BC MSP include:

- [Telus My Health](#)
- [TIA Health](#)
- [Maple](#)

For urgent mental health support, call:


- Suicide crisis: [1-800-SUICIDE](#) ([1-800-784-2433](#))
- Mental health issues: [310-6789](#) (24 hours)
- KUU-US Aboriginal crisis line: [1-800-588-8717](#) (24 hours)

Patients can now also go to their pharmacist who can diagnose and prescribe medications for 21 minor ailments and contraception. Visit [the BC Government website](#) for more information and links to KB pharmacies participating in the initiative.

## **NEW: Access to Cancer Screening for Patients without a Family Practitioner**

The [KBScreen.ca](#) service is available for unattached KB residents to receive preventive screening for breast, cervical, colorectal, and lung cancers; aortic aneurysm; and HIV/syphilis screening. Residents must be registered for the Medical Services Plan, be over age 40 years, and are not having any symptoms. Contact them at [KBScreen.ca](#) or call [1-778-364-0717](#) (Monday–Thursday 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.).

And of course, for emergencies, call 9-1-1 or go to your nearest emergency department – a full list can be found [here](#).



**KB Screen**  
Preventive Screening for Unattached Patients

KB Screen is a virtual service offering age-related routine screening for residents of Kootenay Boundary who don't currently have a primary care provider.\*

We offer screening for colon, breast, cervical and lung cancer.

## Building Your Healthcare Team



Creating a personal healthcare team can help ensure you receive comprehensive care.

One PACC member shares, “Being an amputee and cancer survivor, my 'team' includes a nurse practitioner, chiropractor, prosthetist, oncologist, dentist, optometrist, and my partner and daughter who can take me to healthcare visits and provide support. Having a team with diverse skills ensures that I stay healthy and supported.”

Additional team members might include a pharmacist, social worker, physical or occupational therapist, psychologist, massage therapist, Aboriginal Health Coordinator, or registered dietician.

**We hope these resources are helpful, especially for those of you who currently don't have a family doctor or nurse practitioner.**

**If you find a resource is no longer available or discover a new one, please let the PACC team know at [kbpacc@kbdivision.ca](mailto:kbpacc@kbdivision.ca). Together, as patients, partners, health professionals, we can continue to work together to support and improve our healthcare system.**

## Get “Empowering the Citizen Patient” Direct to Your Inbox!

