
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health

Care coverage extension for long-term vacationers

VICTORIA – Amendments introduced today to the Medicare Protection Act will create authority to set regulations that would allow British Columbians who take longer-term vacations out of the province, such as “snow birds”, to stay on holidays for an extra period of time.

“The Canadian Snowbird Association requested that we extend the six-month residency requirement for Medical Services Plan coverage. Our government listened to them, and we are making the change to permit more flexibility,” said Health Minister Margaret MacDiarmid.

The maximum time a resident can stay out of the province without losing Medical Services Plan (MSP) coverage is six months. Changes to the Medicare Protection Act create new regulation making powers related to residency requirements. It is proposed that a new regulation will allow B.C. residents who are outside of Canada for holidays for six months to have an additional 30 day absence and still maintain their MSP beneficiary status.

“There are many British Columbia seniors who enjoy winters away each year, and this change makes it possible to allow them some extra time away without worrying about losing their MSP coverage,” said Ralph Sultan, Minister of State for Seniors.

The provinces of Ontario and Newfoundland and Labrador also permit residents to be out of the province for more than six months and still maintain their health-care coverage.

“On behalf of the members of the Canadian Snowbird Association, I would like to express our gratitude to Premier Christy Clark and the Honourable Margaret MacDiarmid for keeping their commitment, made in December, to introduce this legislation,” said Bob Slack, president of the Canadian Snowbird Association. “This legislation and the related regulations, when passed, will allow the estimated 144,000 snowbirds, who call British Columbia their permanent home, to travel south during the cold months and still have time to visit family and friends in Canada and around the world without fear of losing their B.C. medical coverage.”

Under the Medicare Protection Act, residents must enrol in MSP in order to become beneficiaries of the health-care system. An individual who no longer meets residency requirements will have their MSP enrolment cancelled and will no longer have access to insured health services.

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