

# A Newcomer Journey through Local Healthcare

## Composite Narratives

Our voices, our experiences



let's tell our stories to bring about change  
in our healthcare system!



Join us in this special project to explore  
and share newcomer realities



navigating local health services.



# Ana



Ana arrived in Canada on a visa that has since expired. She is uncertain what to do about being “out-of-status” and is part of a WhatsApp group who are in similar circumstances, mainly Spanish-speaking women. She is the primary caregiver for her two young children.

Ana’s financial and housing situations are precarious, and she prioritizes food and other necessities for her children. She is not attached to any service agency and her children are not yet school-age.

Ana is generally anxious and afraid of being deported. Because of her language barriers, she does not have broad knowledge of the services and supports available to her, and relies on what her Spanish-speaking friends tell her.

Ana is physically active but suffers from chronic, undiagnosed pain.

Ana had one or two experiences in the healthcare system when her visa was current. She only remembers waiting a long time to see a doctor at a clinic.

Because Ana believes she cannot access the healthcare system because she is “out-of-status,” Ana self-treats and uses home remedies for her children and endures pain and discomfort.

Ana thinks she was vaccinated for COVID-19. Ana is not sure if she has contracted COVID. Her children have not received any vaccinations.

# Bao



Bao arrived in Victoria BC as an international student from China in 2022 to begin undergraduate studies. Bao's mother and father live in China, but he has some extended family here, including a cousin in Vancouver.

Bao is disheartened that his English language skills do not seem to be as advanced as he had thought and he feels he also experiences "accent bias" daily in the wider community. This makes him a bit shy to speak up in class, but he has to talk with customers at work, which can be frustrating.

Bao has a few friends at university and his part-time job, but he also wants to connect more meaningfully with the LGBTQ+ community. This is the first time in his life where he feels safe enough to begin to show and explore his queerness, but the feeling is new to him and he still feels a bit nervous and uncomfortable being "out." Bao is also struggling to find queer friends or a group that reflect and understand the intersection of being a newcomer of colour and gay.

Bao is generally healthy and physically fit and loves to game. Bao has once visited the on-campus clinic for a gastrointestinal illness and a walk-in clinic during the winter break for a respiratory illness. Bao was shocked that he couldn't see a doctor the same day he went to the clinic as it was at capacity by 8:30 AM. He returned the next day at 7:00 AM to line up and was able to see a doctor by the end of the day.

Bao feels that his English ability and accent make it hard for him to be understood by the doctor, but he was able to receive appropriate treatment. He feels the on-campus clinic is much more welcoming to people from various backgrounds than the walk-in clinic. He also finds the university online system easy to use.

Bao is not familiar with LifeLabs, West Coast Imaging, MyCareCompass, MyHealth, Healthlink, Telus Health, or the role of pharmacists in BC. Bao was vaccinated in China for COVID-19 and has contracted COVID-19 at least once, not requiring hospitalization.

# KALEISHA



Kaleisha arrived in Victoria BC as a post-graduate international student just before the pandemic and is now a PR. Kaleisha travels frequently between Jamaica and Canada. Kaleisha is very integrated in the community and has many social networks. She also maintains close ties with members of the local Caribbean diaspora. She is a single mother with a teenaged child who lives with her full-time.

Kaleisha is financially self-supporting and enjoys full-time employment, although it is contract-based. She works in a hybrid office environment. Despite having a “good” salary, she finds the cost of living in Victoria very challenging and a significant portion of her salary goes to food and accommodation, as well as activities for her teenager.

Kaleisha is moderately active, enjoys cooking, and socializing. Kaleisha has a chronic health condition that affects her day-to-day activities periodically. Kaleisha has a local family doctor and a specialist. Kaleisha has also had to seek emergency treatment on occasion for her condition. Kaleisha feels attached to the local healthcare system and understands how to navigate it well.

Kaleisha answers yes to or agrees strongly with:

- 1. I have had challenges accessing specialist care**
- 2. I have had challenges accessing emergency care**

Kaleisha rates her experiences in the healthcare system in Victoria as 3 out of 5.

Kaleisha’s rating is based mainly on wait times in those situations, having waited over one year to see a specialist, and a typical 5-6 hours in emergency. Kaleisha sometimes feels that her racial identity is a barrier to effective communication and treatment in the local healthcare system, particularly in the emergency room.

Kaleisha’s daughter shares her GP and she feels she gets timely access to care, although for urgent needs such as sports injuries, they can spend multiple hours at a walk-in clinic

or emergency room waiting for assessment and treatment. Kaleisha's closest walk-in clinic recently closed permanently due to staff shortages. Kaleisha sometimes relies on traditional home remedies, advice from family, and Dr. Google for self-treatment.

Kaleisha answers "yes" to: I endure pain, discomfort, or loss of ability answering the question: **Which of the following strategies have you used in the past year to address your barriers or perceived barriers to access and timely and appropriate healthcare?**

Kaleisha is very familiar with the pharmacist's role, HealthLink, West Coast Imaging, and how to access health records online. Kaleisha has been vaccinated once for COVID-19 and has to her knowledge contracted COVID-19 twice, not requiring hospitalization.

SAAD



Saad arrived in Victoria BC in 2016 from Syria via Lebanon, without family, but with a larger cohort of Syrians being resettled in Canada. Saad has recently become a Canadian Citizen but still identifies as a newcomer and reports feeling “othered” in some environments. Saad very much misses his siblings and mother, who are stuck in Syria in difficult living situations. Saad is unable to return to Syria without fear of persecution.

Saad has a large network of friends and colleagues of all backgrounds, and socializes often. However, Saad also suffers from depression and sometimes withdraws. Saad speaks multiple languages fluently. Saad has full-time work that he enjoys, but the pay is mediocre and he sends monthly remittances home to his family.

Saad is physically active, but has multiple chronic conditions that sometimes limit his activities and affect his mental health. Because of this, Saad sees his family doctor frequently, and also has a specialist who treats him. Saad is satisfied with the healthcare he receives and although he recognizes the healthcare crisis in Victoria affects many of his friends, his having a family doctor allows him to navigate the healthcare system easily and in a relatively timely fashion.

Saad has visited the emergency room and his local Urgent Primary Care Centre (UPCC) several times and agrees that wait times in the emergency room and UPCC are a barrier to timely care, especially for someone working full-time. Saad does not feel he has experienced any barriers to care because of his racial, gender or other perceived or real “identities.” Saad would like to access mental supports but finds them financially inaccessible and also doesn’t know where to start. Saad may suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Saad is very familiar with LifeLabs, West Coast Imaging, MyCareCompass, MyHealth, Healthlink, and the role of pharmacists. Saad has been vaccinated twice for COVID-19 and has had COVID-19 multiple times, not requiring hospitalization. Saad may be immunocompromised.

# SITA



Sita arrived in Victoria BC as a postgraduate international student just before the pandemic and is now a Permanent Resident. Sita hopes to become a Canadian citizen and settle permanently in Canada.

Sita is social, but finds it hard to make close friends in the city. Sita feels most comfortable with people of a similar background to her. Her roommates are also her co-workers at a large retail store.

Her parents are back in India and send extra financial support regularly. The cost of living in Victoria is shocking to Sita. Sita is struggling to find permanent work commiserate with her qualifications and experience. Sita speaks English fluently but she feels that people don't always understand her accent and maybe discriminate against her in employment or interview situations. She is also told she needs "Canadian experience," which baffles her because she has lived here for four years.

Sita is physically active and generally healthy. She likes to walk and hike along Victoria's many beaches and trails. Sita is generally healthy but has needed to access local healthcare services over the past year for minor infections and respiratory illness. Sita does not have a local family doctor.

Sita answers yes to or agrees strongly with:

- 1. I have had challenges accessing a family doctor**
- 2. I have had challenges accessing a clinic or other healthcare services**

Sita rates her experiences in the healthcare system in Victoria as 2 out of 5.

Sita doesn't understand why a country like Canada has such a poor healthcare system. Sita answers the question: **I would describe my continuity of care using virtual health services and/or walk-in clinics/Urgent and Primary Care centres as a**

**replacement for a general practitioner as:** Unsatisfactory, e.g. I feel my health needs are only being partially met and I am unsupported

Sita feels she is a good advocate for herself and understands medical advice and treatment plans well. However, she has to take a day or more off work in order to see a GP, which is a significant economic barrier. Sita has found a local Urgent Primary Care Centre where a Nurse Practitioner can sometimes meet her health needs in a timely manner. Sita also recently signed up for Telus Health, a virtual health service.

Sita relies on traditional home remedies and Dr. Google for self-treatment. Sita is not very familiar with HealthLink, LifeLabs, West Coast Imaging, or how to access health records online. Sita has returned home twice to India for dental care since 2022, once for emergency care.

Sita has been vaccinated twice for COVID-19 and has to her knowledge contracted COVID-19 three times, not requiring hospitalization.

# SVETLANA



Svetlana arrived in Canada as a displaced Ukrainian, with her husband and a pre-K child. They have no plans to return to Ukraine in the near future.

Svetlana speaks very limited English and relies on Ukrainian friends to help her navigate services and conversations in the community for her and her child. Svetlana is a stay-at-home parent. Svetlana and her family live on one income, and share a house with another family in a temporary situation.

Svetlana is physically active and generally healthy, although she requires semi-urgent dental care. She has accessed local healthcare services over the past year, i.e. a walk-in clinic, for non-serious, acute conditions for her and her child. She brought along a friend to help translate. Svetlana does not have a family doctor.

Svetlana answers yes or agrees strongly with:

- 1. I have had challenges accessing a family doctor**
- 2. I have had challenges accessing a clinic or other healthcare services**

Svetlana rates her experiences in the healthcare system in Victoria as 3 out of 5.

Svetlana has heard of the Provincial Language Services for interpreter support in the healthcare system but doesn't really know how to navigate it and has never used it. She prefers having a friend help translate. Svetlana would like to find a family doctor for herself and her family but doesn't know where to start.

Svetlana does not know about HealthLink, LifeLabs, West Coast Imaging, or how to access health records online. Svetlana needs a root canal but does not have a dentist and cannot afford the procedure. Svetlana thinks she was vaccinated twice for COVID-19 and to her knowledge has not contracted COVID-19.