



Navigating Healthcare

The Senior's Guide

A CLINIQUE MEDIC ELLE INITIATIVE
PREPARED FOR THE CUMMINGS CENTRE



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Welcome

Navigating the healthcare system in Québec can feel overwhelming and confusing. Between clinics, hospitals, specialists and tests, it is not always easy to know where to start or where to go for help.

This guide was created to help make the healthcare system easier to understand. Its goal is to provide clear, simple information to help senior patients and families begin their healthcare navigation journey with more confidence.

While this guide does not include everything there is to know about the Québec healthcare system, it offers a starting point. Inside, you will find different sections covering topics such as:

- Definitions and Acronyms (pages 2-3)
- Accessing Healthcare Services (pages 4-5)
- Types of Medical Appointments (page 6)
- Tests, Imaging and Results (pages 7-8)
- Final Tips (page 9)

- Medic Elle Team

Common Healthcare Acronyms

(You may not need to know all of them)

RAMQ

Régie de l'Assurance Maladie du Québec

Québec's public health insurance program. RAMQ provides health insurance cards and covers many medical services for eligible residents.

GAMF

Guichet d'Accès à un Médecin de Famille

A waiting list and registration system for people looking for a family doctor in Québec.

GAP

Guichet d'Accès à la Première ligne

A service that helps people without a family doctor access healthcare professionals and medical appointments.

GMF

Groupe de Médecine de Famille

A family medicine clinic where doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals work together to provide primary care. This is the type of clinic you are enrolled with if you are registered for team-based care.

ER

Emergency Room

A hospital department that provides urgent care for serious or life-threatening conditions.

CISSS/CIUSSS

Centre Intégré de Santé et de Services Sociaux/Centre Intégré Universitaire de Santé et de Services Sociaux

Regional organizations that coordinate healthcare and social services in Québec. They manage services such as hospitals, CLSCs, rehabilitation centres, mental health services, and long-term care facilities.

SAPA

Soutien à l'Autonomie des Personnes Âgées

Provincial program coordinating home care services for seniors with loss of autonomy.

CLSC

Centre Local de Services Communautaires

Community health centres that provide local health and social services such as nursing care, vaccinations, home care, mental health support, and social services.

CHSLD

Centre d'Hébergement de Soins de Longue Durée

Long-term care homes for people who need ongoing assistance and medical supervision.

RPA

Résidence Privée pour Aînés

Private residences designed for older adults who are mostly independent but may benefit from support services and a safer living environment. RPAs can offer services such as meals, housekeeping, recreational activities, medication reminders, and varying levels of assistance, depending on residents' needs.

CRDS

Centre de Répartition des Demandes de Services

A centralized referral system used in Québec to help patients access certain medical specialists and diagnostic services more efficiently.

GASMA

Guichet d'Accès en Santé Mentale Adulte

A mental health access service that helps adults connect with mental health care and support services in Québec. Healthcare professionals can refer patients to GASMA for assessment and short-term mental health support.



Healthcare Professionals

Primary Care Providers (PCP)

FAMILY DOCTOR (FAMILY PHYSICIAN)

Provides general medical care. Diagnose illnesses, prescribe medications, order tests, manage chronic conditions, provide preventive care, and refer patients to specialists when needed. Also known as a GP (General Practitioner).

NURSE PRACTITIONER (IPS) Infirmier(ère) Praticien(ne) Spécialisé(e)

An advanced practice nurse who can assess patients, diagnose illnesses, prescribe medications, order tests, much like a family doctor.

Nurses

LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSE (LPN)

Provides basic nursing care such as assisting with daily care, administering certain medications, and supporting patients under the supervision of nurses or physicians.

REGISTERED NURSE (RN)

Provides direct patient care, monitors health conditions, administers medications, performs assessments, educates patients, and helps coordinate care.

Healthcare Specialists

SPECIALIST DOCTOR

A physician with advanced training in a specific area of medicine, such as cardiology, dermatology, psychiatry, or orthopedics. Specialists focus on more specific or complex health conditions. To see one, a referral from a PCP is required.

PHARMACIST

Dispenses medications, explains how medications should be taken, checks for drug interactions, provides vaccinations in some settings, and advises patients on medication safety and minor health concerns.

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

Helps patients maintain independence in daily activities such as dressing, bathing, cooking, and moving safely at home.

SOCIAL WORKER

Helps patients and families cope with social, emotional, financial, and family-related challenges. Social workers can connect patients with community resources and support services.

OTHERS

Physiotherapist, Dietician, Speech-Language Pathologist, Respiratory Therapist, Psychologist and many more.



Accessing Care

DO YOU HAVE A FAMILY DOCTOR?

If the answer is **yes**, skip to page 5
if the answer is **no**, keep reading



MAKE SURE YOU HAVE RAMQ COVERAGE

- Have a valid Québec health insurance card.
- If you're new to Québec, register with the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec as soon as you're eligible.

REGISTER FOR A FAMILY DOCTOR

- Add your name to the GAMF waiting list on the Québec Health website or call to register by phone. Find the number by entering your postal code using the Québec Health website.
- Wait times vary depending on your health needs and where you live. While you're waiting, you can still receive care through other services.

USE THE GAP

- If you need non-urgent medical care and don't have a family doctor, use the Primary Care Access Point (GAP).
- **Call 811, option 3**
 - A healthcare professional will assess your needs and connect you with the right service, such as a clinic, pharmacist, testing, or medical advice.

SEE OTHER HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

- Pharmacists can prescribe for many common conditions.
- Nurse practitioners and nurses can assess and treat many routine health issues.
- Mental health and social services may also be available through your local health network.

EMERGENCIES

For symptoms such as severe chest pain, difficulty breathing, signs of a stroke, or severe injury, **call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.**



STAYING ORGANIZED WITHOUT A FAMILY DOCTOR

You may see different healthcare providers at different clinics. Being organized can help prevent gaps in your care.

To help keep your care coordinated:

- Carry an up-to-date list of your medications, allergies, medical conditions, and healthcare providers.
- Bring copies of important test results, specialist reports, or hospital discharge summaries when possible.
- Keep a record of appointments, treatments, and any changes to your medications.
- Ask questions and make sure you understand your care plan before leaving your appointment.
- Bring someone with you: A family member or caregiver can help take notes, ask questions, and remember instructions



Accessing Care

WHEN YOU HAVE A FAMILY DOCTOR
OR ARE ENROLLED IN A GMF

CONTACT YOUR FAMILY DOCTOR'S CLINIC OR YOUR GMF

- For both new or ongoing health concerns.
- Most family doctors in Quebec work in a Family Medicine Group (GMF), where they collaborate with nurses, nurse practitioners, pharmacists, social workers, and other healthcare professionals.

ASK ABOUT SAME-DAY OR URGENT APPOINTMENTS.

- For health concerns that cannot wait.
- If your family doctor is unavailable, another healthcare professional or physician within the GMF may be able to see you for urgent concerns.
- Whenever possible, seek care within your GMF to help maintain continuity of care and avoid unnecessary visits to walk-in clinics, private clinics or the emergency department.

USE OTHER MEMBERS OF YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM.

- Nurses and nurse practitioners can assess and treat many common health concerns, order certain tests, and provide follow-up care.
- Pharmacists can prescribe for some minor illnesses, renew certain prescriptions, answer medication questions, and help manage chronic conditions.
- Using the right healthcare professional can often help you receive care more quickly and free up physician appointments for more complex medical needs.

CALL 811

- If you're having difficulty or unsure where to seek care or need health advice.
- A registered nurse can assess your symptoms, provide guidance, and direct you to the most appropriate healthcare service based on your needs.

EMERGENCIES

For symptoms such as severe chest pain, difficulty breathing, signs of a stroke, or severe injury, **call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.**



MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM

Many healthcare professionals may be involved in your care. Staying organized helps them provide the best possible care.

To help keep your care coordinated:

- Carry an up-to-date list of your medications, allergies, medical conditions, and healthcare providers.
- Keep copies of important test results, specialist reports, or hospital discharge summaries.
- Keep a record of appointments, treatments, and any changes to your medications.
- Ask questions and make sure you understand your care plan before leaving your appointment.
- Bring a family member or caregiver to help take notes, ask questions, and remember instructions.
- Keep your family doctor informed about any visits to specialists, walk-in clinics, or the emergency department to help ensure your care remains coordinated.

Types of Medical Appointments

ROUTINE FOLLOW-UP APPOINTMENT

When to book:

Annual check-ups, chronic disease follow-up (e.g., diabetes or high blood pressure), medication reviews, or non-urgent concerns. Should be booked with your Primary Care Provider.

Examples:

Chronic joint pain, sleep problems, preventive care, or discussing test results.

TELEPHONE OR VIRTUAL APPOINTMENT

When to book:

Concerns that do not require a physical examination.

Examples:

Reviewing test results, medication questions, prescription renewals, or follow-up visits.

SAME-DAY OR URGENT APPOINTMENT

When to book:

A new health concern that should be assessed within 24–48 hours but is not life-threatening.

Examples:

Fever, urinary symptoms, worsening cough, ear infection, skin infection, or a minor injury.

NURSING APPOINTMENT

When to book:

For education, monitoring, follow-up care, or certain treatments.

Examples:

Blood pressure checks, wound care, vaccinations, chronic disease education, lifestyle counselling, or follow-up after a recent illness.

SPECIALIST APPOINTMENT

When to book:

After a referral from your family doctor or nurse practitioner for a condition that requires specialized care. Or when the specialist requests a follow-up.

Examples:

Heart problems (cardiologist), arthritis (rheumatologist), digestive concerns (gastroenterologist), or bone and joint conditions (orthopedic surgeon).

PHARMACIST CONSULTATION

When to book:

Medication advice, prescription renewals, or treatment for certain minor illnesses.

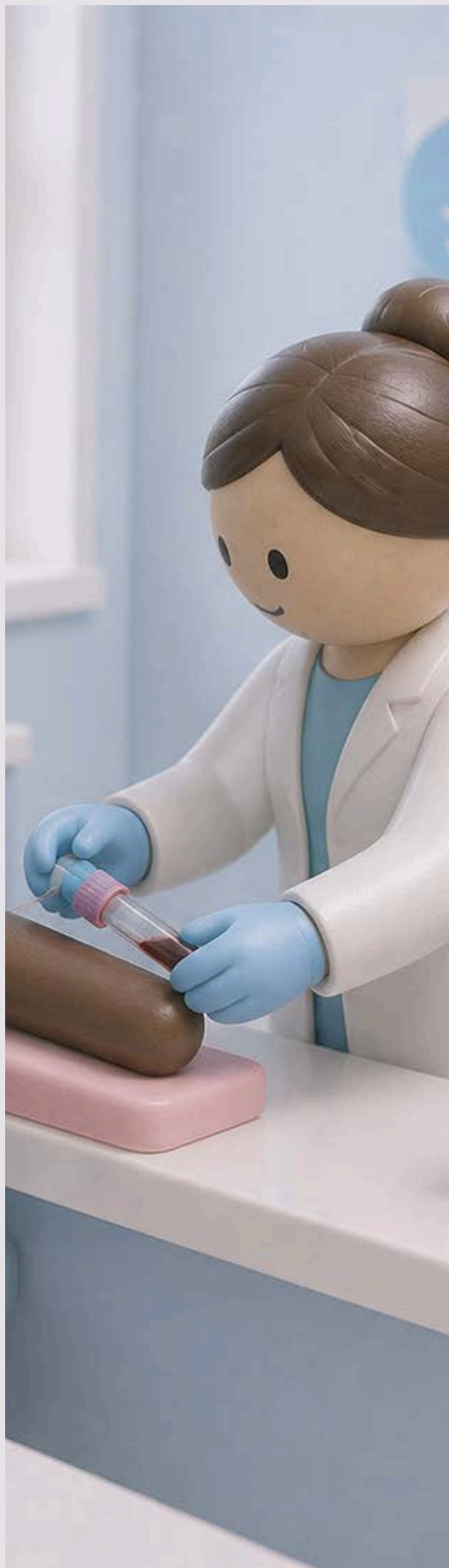
Examples:

Cold sores, allergies, eczema flare-ups, uncomplicated urinary tract infections, or questions about your medications.

EMERGENCIES

For symptoms such as severe chest pain, difficulty breathing, signs of a stroke, or severe injury, **call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.**





Getting Blood Tests and Medical Imaging in Québec

Blood Tests (Laboratory Tests)

- Your healthcare provider will give you a laboratory requisition.
- Most blood tests require an appointment, which can be booked through Clic Santé or directly with the testing site.
- If you have an open file with SAPA, inform your pivot, collection may be possible at home.
- Blood tests can be done at:
 - Local Service Points (Points de services locaux/PSLs) Can be looked up online.
 - Some hospitals
 - Private laboratories (fees may apply)

Important: Some hospitals only accept lab requests from healthcare providers affiliated with their hospital. If your request is declined, you can usually have your blood work done at a Point de services local (PSL) or another designated laboratory.

X-rays and Ultrasounds

- With a valid requisition, X-rays and ultrasounds can often be performed at:
 - Community imaging clinics (try first)
 - Hospital imaging departments
- Many community imaging clinics provide RAMQ-covered services. Private (self-pay) appointments may also be available for faster access.

CT Scans and MRI

- CT scans and MRI examinations require a requisition and a consent form from a healthcare provider.
- Most publicly funded CT scans and MRIs are performed in hospitals.
- Private imaging centres also offer CT and MRI services for patients who choose to pay out of pocket or have private insurance coverage.

Who Is Responsible for Your Test Results?

Understanding who orders your tests and who follows up on the results can help prevent delays in your care.

Who is responsible for reviewing my results?

- The healthcare professional who orders the test is responsible for reviewing the results and discussing them with you if follow-up is needed.
- If a specialist orders the test, the specialist is responsible for reviewing the results, even if your family doctor receives a copy.
- If you have questions or have not received your results within the expected timeframe, contact the healthcare provider who ordered the test.
- Register for Carnet santé Québec. This secure online portal lets you view your results 30 days after they are received.

Who has access to my health information?

- Your family doctor can access some of your medical information within Québec's health system, but they may not automatically receive information from every clinic or specialist.
- Specialists can usually access information relevant to your care, but they may not see records from every healthcare organization.
- Pharmacists can access your medication profile.
- Healthcare providers outside Québec or in private clinics likely do not have access to your hospital or clinic records.

How can I help keep my care coordinated?

- Keep a record of your appointments, tests, and results.
- Tell each healthcare provider about any recent tests, specialist visits, or emergency department visits.
- Register for Carnet santé Québec online.



Final Tips

Remember: You are the most important member of your healthcare team. Keeping informed, staying organized, and asking questions can help you receive safer, more coordinated care.

-  **Be an active partner in your care.** Don't hesitate to ask questions, take notes, and make sure you understand your care plan.
-  **Keep your health information organized.** Carry an up-to-date list of your medications, allergies, medical conditions, healthcare providers, and emergency contacts.
-  **Use the right healthcare professional.** Your family doctor is not always the only option. Nurses, nurse practitioners, pharmacists, and other members of your healthcare team can often provide timely care.
-  **Know whom to contact.** If you have questions about a test, medication, or referral, contact the healthcare provider who ordered it or is managing that aspect of your care. Call 811 if you're unsure where to seek care.
-  **Register for Carnet santé Québec.** It allows you to access your health information and keep track of your care. Remember that most laboratory and imaging results appear 30 days after they are received by the healthcare professional who ordered the test.
-  **Bring a trusted family member or caregiver** to appointments if you need help taking notes, asking questions, or remembering instructions.
-  **Keep a list of important phone numbers,** including your family doctor's clinic, pharmacy, specialists, 811 and 911 for emergencies.





Navigate Healthcare with Confidence

We hope this guide has helped you better understand how to navigate Québec's healthcare system and feel more confident accessing the care you need.

We wish you good health!