



Social Determinants of Health Fact Sheet:

Cortes Island

The Strathcona Community Health Network is pleased to share these community health profiles. We have developed a community health profile for each of the eight communities within our region.

Community health profiles were developed for two purposes: 1) to support the ongoing work of the Strathcona Community Health Network, and 2) to build capacity within the Strathcona region.

1. The Strathcona Community Health Network (SCHN) has articulated our approach to work, which includes a commitment to being evidence-informed by balancing the best available data with local knowledge in collaborative decisions. These community health profiles, then, have created an opportunity to define and collect or generate local data to support decision making and future action by the SCHN.
2. Perhaps more importantly, the SCHN's approach also involves community capacity building. Per our Strategic Plan, we "encourage a capacity building approach so the community is strengthened and partners grow and improve their knowledge, skills and infrastructure through engaging with the network."

Community health profiles can be used to build community capacity in many ways, including the following:

- Use the information within to support planning and decision-making processes.
- Utilize this report as evidence when applying for grant funding and/or providing evaluation information to funders.
- Employ the information within when advocating for policy changes at all levels of government.
- Connect with the individuals, organizations, and coalitions within your community that are working towards greater outcomes. If you'd like more information about these groups, please contact us.
- Initiate conversations with your neighbours, family, friends, and colleagues about the information that stood out to you. Can you take any small or grassroots actions in support of increased community health?
- Let us know if the SCHN should be aware of any initiatives happening in your community related to the social determinants of health. Our contact information is on the final page.



Community Context

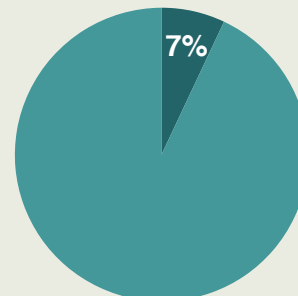
Like many other west coast communities, Cortes Island was inhabited by Indigenous peoples prior to colonization. Coast Salish people made use of Cortes Island for thousands of years, but a smallpox epidemic decimated the population in the late 1700s. Today, the Klahoose First Nation live at Squirrel Cove. On Cortes, the Indigenous population comprises **7.0%** of the island's total population.^{1,2}

Cortes Island has grown modestly in recent years, from **1,007** people in 2011 to **1,035** in 2016.² The largest age cohort on Cortes Island is the population aged 15-64 years old. They comprise **58.9%** of the population. The remainder of the population is comprised of seniors (**28.0%**) and children 14 years old and younger (**13.1%**). The median age of the population is **53.5** years – a few years younger than neighbouring Quadra Island but considerably higher than the provincial median of **43.0**.² The population increases in the summer, as Cortes hosts about **3000** people per day.³

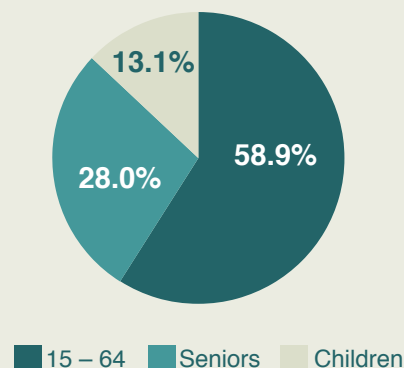
Though Cortes Island's population has been relatively stable, movement both to and from the island has been recorded. Between 2011 and 2016, there were **520** household moves on Cortes – many from within the community or the province (**72.3%**), but **27.7%** moved from either another province or another country.²

Like neighbouring communities, Cortes Island fits into multiple service delivery areas. It is a member of the Strathcona Regional District's Area B. It is included in School District 72 boundaries, and in Local Health Area 72 (Campbell River), and in the larger North Vancouver Island Health Services Delivery Area.

Indigenous Population



Quadra Island Age Cohorts



General Well-being

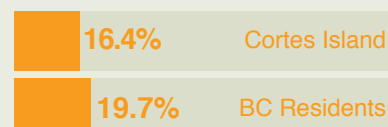
As members of the North Vancouver Island Health Service Delivery Area, residents of Cortes Island report a high rate of community belonging: **77.6%** of residents report a somewhat strong or strong sense of community belonging, compared to **71.6%** of BC residents. Likewise, Cortes Island residents report lower perceptions of life stress than provincial residents (**16.4%** report that most days in their lives are quite a bit or extremely stressful, compared to **19.7%** provincially).⁴

In Local Health Area 72 (Campbell River), which includes Cortes Island, **13.5** litres of absolute alcohol are sold per person. This is considerably higher than the Island Health average of **10.9** and the provincial average of **9.0**. Given that one litre of absolute alcohol is equivalent to 58 standard drinks, residents of LHA 72 are consuming **783** alcoholic beverages annually, on average.⁵

Community Belonging



Life Stress



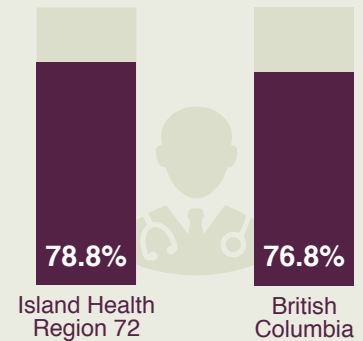


Health Care

Another measure in which residents of Island Health Region 72 (Campbell River) compare positively to their provincial counterparts is in physician attachment. In LHA 72, which includes Cortes Island, **78.8%** of residents are patients of a physical or other primary health care provider (nurse practitioner, community health nurse, etc.). In BC, **76.8%** of residents are attached to a primary care provider.⁴

Cortes Island residents receive many health services from the community-owned Cortes Health Centre, which is operated by the non-profit Cortes Community Health Association. The Health Centre hosts general practitioners, and also offers equipment loans, Travel Assistance Program (TAP) forms, foot care services, telehealth, and free mental health counseling. Health promotion activities, including Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, are also offered here.⁶ The North Island Hospital (Campbell River & District) is the closest hospital for Cortes Island residents.

Physician Attachment



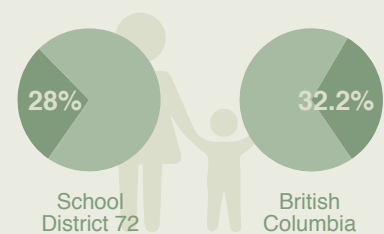
Children and Youth

Time and time again, research emphasizes that investing in the health and well-being of children and youth has positive health, economic, and community impacts for decades to come. One of the most important measures of young children's health is the Early Development Instrument, which examines a child's experiences in the first five years of life via 5 scales (Physical Health & Well-Being, Social Competence, Emotional Maturity, Language & Cognitive Development, and Communication Skills & General Knowledge). In School District 72, which includes Cortes Island, **28%** of Kindergarten children are deemed vulnerable, meaning that without additional support, these children may experience future challenges in school and society. Provincially, the vulnerability rate is **32.2%**.⁷

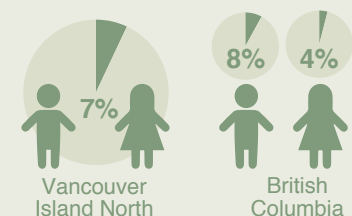
Another measure of support for early childhood development is the number of childcare spaces available. On Cortes Island, there are **17** licensed childcare spaces. The Cortes Island Playschool offers a half-day program two days per week.⁸ However, there is no licensed full-time care for any age group (Infant/Toddler, preschool, or school age children).

As children get older, there are a number of institutions to support healthy development, including a community centre offering facilities and programs for children and youth, parks, trails, and playgrounds, beaches, a library, and organized sport, recreation, and arts and culture opportunities.

Child Vulnerability Rate

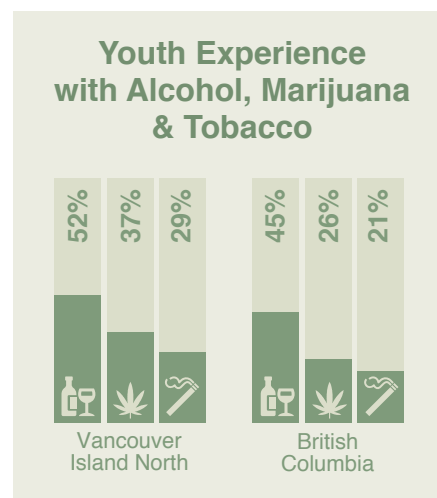


Youth Obesity Rate



The youth obesity rate for Vancouver Island North, which includes Cortes Island, is **7%** for both males and females. Provincially, it is **8%** for males and **4%** for females.⁹

The McCreary Adolescent Health Survey reports on youth experience with alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco. In Vancouver Island North, which includes Cortes Island, **52%** of youth have tried alcohol, compared to **45%** provincially. Similarly, **37%** of Vancouver Island North youth have tried marijuana, compared to **26%** provincially. Tobacco sees a similar trend, with **29%** of Vancouver Island North youth trying tobacco, compared to **21%** of youth provincially.⁹



Food Security

The World Health Organization (WHO) includes food security in its list of social determinants of health and defines household food security as “appropriate food being available, with adequate access and being affordable (location of markets, supermarkets, and closure of small suppliers creating food deserts in cities).” WHO stresses the importance of food security particularly in small and remote communities.¹⁰

There are **4** stores from which to buy groceries on Cortes Island. The Cortes Natural Food Co-op primarily offer groceries, while the Cortes Market, Squirrel Cove General Store and the Gorge Harbour General Store offer groceries and other goods. There is also a year-round farmer’s market, and two other markets that run in the summer.¹¹ Community members that require assistance accessing food may turn to the Cortes Island Food Bank, hosted out of Manson’s Hall.¹² Anecdotally, residents note that there are many backyard gardens on Cortes, and residents like to grow some of their own food. The Cortes Island Local Economic Action Plan survey results found that **63%** of respondents produce or locally source at least **21%** of their food. Low income respondents are even more likely to produce or locally source their own food.¹³

The Provincial Health Services Authority’s “Food Costing in BC” report for 2017 reports on the cost of sufficient, safe, and nutritious foods across the province. For the North Island Health Services Delivery Area, the monthly cost of healthy food is **\$1,036** (compare this to the provincial average of **\$1,019**).¹⁴ However, the cost can be greater for communities like Cortes Island, because food may be more expensive in local grocery stores, or because local stores may carry limited stock and a trip to Campbell River may be necessary. Fares for a vehicle and passenger to ferry from Cortes Island to Campbell River are **\$59.10**.¹⁵





Transportation

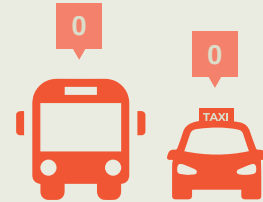
Being able to get from one place to another is essential for everyone, but particularly for members of rural and remote communities. On Cortes Island, having access to a vehicle is necessary to purchase food and household goods, access health and social services, access employment, and travel to Vancouver Island.

There is no public transportation on Cortes Island. No bus routes exist. There is a service called the Cortes Connection, which provides bus rides from one end of Cortes Island to the other, to the ferry, or to Campbell River. (Note: This service was not available in fall 2018, but hopes to resume soon.)¹⁶ Water taxi and floatplane may also be used to access the community, however these are very expensive travel options mainly used in calm summer weather by tourists, not affordable to the average islander for routine travel.¹⁷

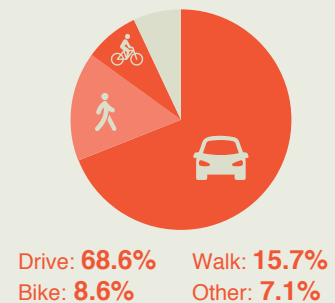
There are no official active transportation routes on Cortes Island, but residents report that many locals ride their bikes or walk to commute to work, run errands, and for leisure. The relatively quiet roads may be safe to bike without bike lanes. For recreation, there are many hiking and biking trails on the island.

When asked about how employed residents get to work, **68.6%** reported that they commute by car (most as drivers, but **11.6%** as passengers). Another **15.7%** reported walking to work, **8.6%** reported biking, and the remainder utilized another method.² **77.1%** of employed residents have a commute that is 30 minutes or less in length. The remaining quarter commute for 30-45 minutes or 60 minutes or more, suggesting work on Quadra Island, in Campbell River, or beyond.²

Public Transport



Commute to Work



Housing

Access to safe, adequate, and affordable housing is essential in ensuring the health of a community's residents. Inadequate housing affects physical health – housing that is mouldy, dirty, or in need of major repairs may put a resident at risk of developing one-time or chronic illnesses. Housing that is unaffordable, overcrowded, or otherwise unsuitable contributes to increased stress and/or decreased quality of life.

On Cortes Island, the median value of a home is **\$300,973**.² The median monthly cost of home ownership is **\$383**.² Median monthly cost is the total cost for a mortgage, property taxes, and the cost of electricity, heat, water, and other municipal services. These relatively low home ownership costs may be explained by a related statistic. Only **35.8%** of owner households on Cortes have a mortgage. In other words, **74.2%** of owner households own their home outright, and utilities and property taxes are the only costs associated with home ownership. These homeowners may have purchased their properties decades ago, when costs were lower. Of all owned homes – with or without a mortgage – **19.4%** spend 30% or more of an owner's income.²

Monthly Housing Costs: Rental and Ownership



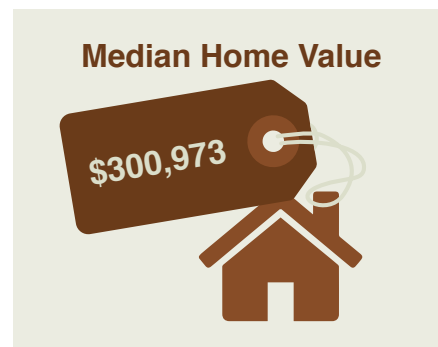
Home ownership: **\$383**
Rental housing: **\$694**

On the other hand, renter households - which comprise **34.6%** of total households on Cortes Island - have a median monthly shelter cost of **\$694** and **47.2%** of renters spend 30% or more of their income on housing.²

A household is considered at risk of homelessness when 30% or more of the resident's earnings are spent on housing costs.

Of all homes on Cortes Island, only **4.9%** have been reported as requiring major repairs.²

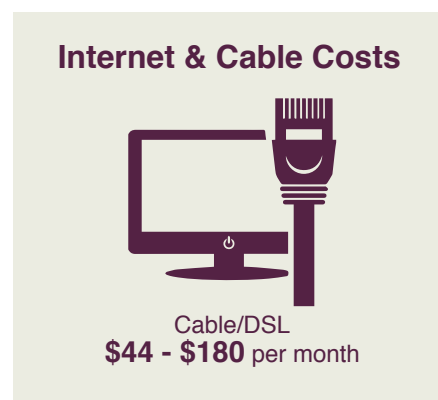
As no formal homelessness count has been conducted on Cortes Island, local residents were relied on for their input. Residents mentioned the hidden homeless population. The hidden homeless may be couch surfing or living in overcrowded residences with family or friends. Additionally, homelessness is a regular risk for renters, as short-term vacation rentals become more popular on the island.¹⁸



Connectivity

Access to phone and internet services is necessary for reasons related explicitly to health – including access to health and emergency services and opportunities for telehealth – but also to meet other needs. Access to phone and internet services also allows access to education and professional development, employment, connection to friends and family, and entertainment, among others. There is spotty cell phone coverage on Cortes Island. Many residents continue to rely on landlines, or have both a landline and a cell phone. A landline from can cost **\$40** per month or more, depending on whether or not additional features are needed.¹⁹ There are a handful of internet providers offering wireless internet to Cortes Island. An individual household can expect to pay between **\$44** and **\$180** per month, depending on desired speed and usage.²⁰ The Cortes Island branch of the Vancouver Island Regional Library offers free access to the internet during open hours. Internet is also available in some stores and community centres, for free or a small fee.²¹

Though not all residents who work from home would utilize home phone and internet, some would. On Cortes Island, **30%** of the workforce works from home.²





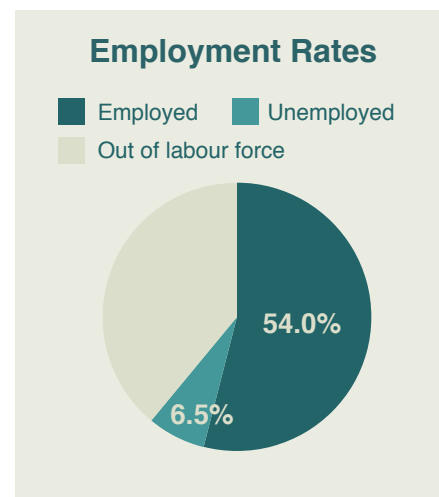
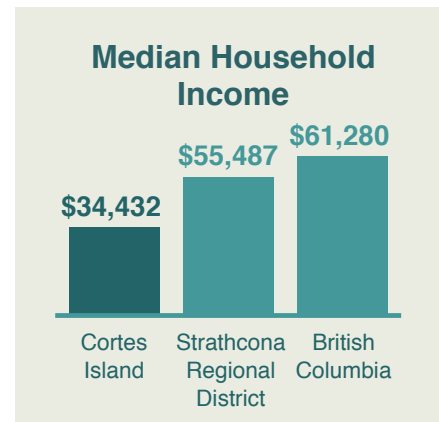
Employment and Income

Living Wage Canada notes that “Income plays an important role in health outcomes. In general, the less someone is paid the poorer their health is across a number of physical and psychological measures. In addition, employment and working conditions have a significant impact on our health.”²² Rural and remote communities like Cortes Island have limited education and employment opportunities and may have fewer appropriate work opportunities than larger communities.

Cortes Island’s median household after-tax income is **\$34,432** – nearly **\$30,000** less than the provincial average. It is also lower than neighbouring Quadra Island, and less the Strathcona Regional District median of **\$55,487**.²

Most income on Cortes Island is generated by employment (**53.6%**), while **20.6%** comes from government transfers including the Old Age Pension, Guaranteed Income Supplement, Canada Pension Plan, child benefits, or social assistance benefits.² Cortes Island has an employment rate of **54.0%** and an unemployment rate of **6.5%**.²

Given Cortes Island’s popularity as a summer tourist destination, it isn’t surprising to learn that **17.8%** of employed residents work in sales and services, which includes accommodations. This is the second most popular sector, after trades, transport, and equipment operators, which employs **18.7%** of the workforce.² The number of employed resident’s dependent on visitors may also explain the high rate of part time and/or part year workers – on Cortes Island, **79.3%** of the workforce is part year and/or part time, compared to **54.1%** of the provincial population.²



Education and Training

Education and training are increasingly integral to employment success. There is an elementary and junior high school on Cortes Island, but high school students must travel to Campbell River to complete their education.²³ Those wishing to access post-secondary training may choose between leaving the community, commuting to Vancouver Island, or learning via distance.

North Island Employment Foundations Society (NIEFS) visits the community occasionally to deliver job search skills and training and to provide information about various employment and self-employment opportunities, and has partnered with Cortes Literacy Now to do so.²⁴

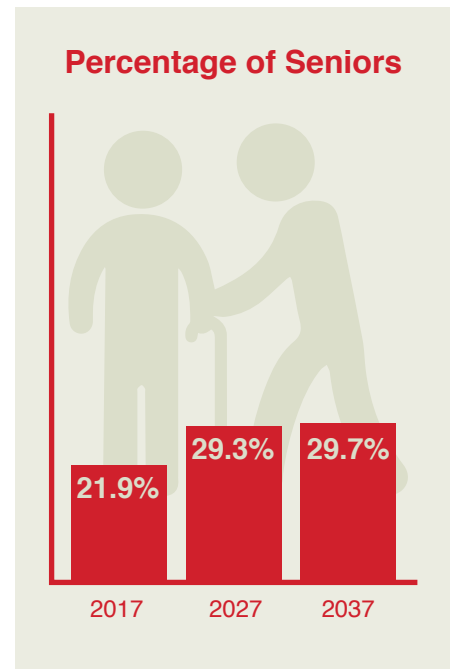
Cortes is also home to two educational organizations: Linnaea Farm and Hollyhock. The former offers instruction in farming and food production, and the latter delivers on creativity, movement, social innovation, and wisdom teachings.^{25,26}

Ageing

Growing old requires related social, financial, and health supports. Currently, the proportion of the population in LHA 72 (which includes Cortes Island) that is comprised of seniors is **21.9%**. That proportion is expected to grow to **29.3%** by 2027, and to **29.7%** by 2037.⁵ Some senior's housing exists on Cortes Island. In addition to home care nursing, the Cortes Island Seniors Society operates a **6-unit** retirement home that offers both independent and assisted living.²⁷ There are no memory care facilities for people with Alzheimer's or dementia on Cortes Island.

Similarly, one measure of senior health is the proportion of seniors who live at home (often called "ageing in place"). Seniors who age in place can feel isolated if they live alone; seniors that live with a partner, roommate, or family members often have a higher quality of life than those living alone. In Local Health Area 72 (Campbell River), which includes Cortes Island, **26.3** of seniors live alone. Provincially, **27.3%** of seniors live alone.⁵

One of the barriers to growing old on Cortes Island is the existing housing stock. Many of the homes are large, and are situated on large properties that require substantial upkeep. A senior individual or couple would have difficulty finding a home that allows them to downsize.



The Social Determinants of Health

The Strathcona Community Health Network (SCHN) works collaboratively to increase the health of the residents of the Strathcona Regional District. Focusing on upstream prevention, the SCHN focuses on the social determinants of health to guide its work.

In Canada, the following social determinants of health are frequently referenced: Income and income distribution, education, unemployment and job security, employment and working conditions, early childhood development, food insecurity, housing, social inclusion/exclusion, social safety network, health services, Aboriginal status, gender, race, disability.

The SCHN has engaged in extensive community consultation, including two forums. Community consultation surfaced the following social determinants of health most relevant to the region: First Nations and Cultural Safety, Healthy Children, Food Security, Housing, Ageing and Caregiver Support, Connectivity, Transportation.

Within these seven distinct determinants, there are many areas of overlap. On Cortes Island, some obvious links are evident. The first is the link between housing and health. Housing experiences are varied on Cortes Island, with housing costs being generally very affordable for long-time island residents who purchased homes two or even three decades ago. However, the same cannot be said for newer residents, or for renters. Housing reports demonstrate that it is difficult to secure an affordable, long-term rental on Cortes, partly because of the number of properties listed on short-term rental websites (particularly in the summer months). This causes stress for island residents who wish to have a home base but find themselves evicted at the start of the tourism season, or who have to pay exorbitant rents to remain in place.

Related to this is the issue of ageing in place. Research demonstrates that seniors tend to lead healthier lives when they are able to age in place. This can be difficult on Cortes, because houses built decades ago are often large and on large pieces of property, making home maintenance difficult for seniors. Additionally, the lack of senior's support services and the need to travel to Campbell River or beyond for specialty medical services means that Cortes seniors may experience many barriers to ageing in place.

This leads to a third link – that of connectivity and health. Cortes Island is two ferry rides away from Vancouver Island. Trips to Vancouver Island are necessary to attend school and for medical appointments, but trips are costly both financially and in terms of travel time. Better internet and more extensive cell phone coverage on the island may facilitate opportunities to meet educational, medical, and other needs without leaving the island.

Which links are evident to you?

Sources

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- ² Statistics Canada, Census 2016 – Strathcona B, Regional District Electoral Area [Census Subdivision]
- ³ Campbell River Mirror, May 24, 2018, Cortes Island: A small island rich with stories
- ⁴ Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2015-2016
- ⁵ Island Health, Local Health Area Profile 72 (Campbell River), 2015
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- ⁷ Human Early Learning Partnership, Early Development Instrument, School District 72, 2014-2016, www.earlylearning.ubc.ca.
- ⁸ PacificCARE Child Care Information and Referral (Personal correspondence)
- ⁹ Poon, C., Peled, M., Stewart, D., Kovaleva, K., Cullen, A., Smith, A., & McCreary Centre Society (2015). North Vancouver Island: Results of the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey. Vancouver, BC: McCreary Centre Society.
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- ¹³ Cortes Island Business and Tourism Association, 2017 Cortes Island Economic Plan Survey, http://cibata.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Cortes_Island_LEAP_Results_Oct_2017-Condensed-1.pdf
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- ¹⁶ Our Cortes, Getting Here, Cortes Connection, <http://ourcortes.com/getting-here/cortes-connection/>
- ¹⁷ Our Cortes, Getting Here, <http://ourcortes.com/getting-here/>
- ¹⁸ Strathcona Community Health Network, Regional Housing Needs Assessment, Part 2: Community Engagement Summary Report, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59b1994b49fc2b50d068eb7e/t/5b2c083c352f53bd7c44188a/1529612359429/Housing+Needs+Assessment+-+Part+2.pdf>
- ¹⁹ Telus.com, Home phone plans
- ²⁰ Yellow Pages, Internet Service Providers for Cortes Island, BC and Canadian ISP, ISP search for Cortes Island
- ²¹ Our Cortes, Community FAQ
- ²² Living Wage Canada, What is a living wage?, <http://www.livingwagecanada.ca/index.php/about-living-wage/>.
- ²³ School District 72 (Campbell River), School Boundaries & Locator
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- ²⁵ Linnaea Farms, Our Offerings, <http://linnaeafarm.org/programs/>
- ²⁶ Hollyhock, Programs, <https://hollyhock.ca/programlist/>
- ²⁷ Cortes Radio, Cortes Island Senior's Society's Purchase, <https://cortesradio.ca/cortes-island-seniors-societys-purchase/>



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