



BUSINESS COUNCIL  
OF ALBERTA

# From Promise to Practice:

*Improving Immigrant  
Success to Drive  
Prosperity in Alberta*

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## About the Business Council of Alberta

The Business Council of Alberta is a non-partisan, non-profit organization dedicated to building a better Alberta within a more dynamic Canada. Composed of the chief executives and leading entrepreneurs of the province's largest enterprises, Council members are proud to represent the majority of Alberta's private sector investment, job creation, exports, and research and development. The Council is committed to working with leaders and stakeholders across Alberta and Canada in proposing bold and innovative public policy solutions and initiatives that will make life better for Albertans.

## Land Acknowledgement

In the spirit of truth, reconciliation, and respect, we honour and acknowledge the lands upon which we live and work as guests, including the traditional territories of the First Nations in Treaties 6, 7, and 8 and the citizens of the Metis Nation of Alberta. We thank the First Peoples of this land, which we now call Alberta, for their generations of stewardship of the land, and we seek to walk together in the spirit of truth and reconciliation to build a shared future for all in Alberta.

*This document reflects the views of the Business Council of Alberta based on our own research and on engagement with members and stakeholders. Alberta is a diverse place. In many cases, there are a range of views on an issue within the Council membership. This piece may not necessarily reflect the perspective of all BCA member companies, and should not be read as the position of any one member.*

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# Introduction

Immigration can play a vital role in building the skills of Alberta’s workforce and strengthening the provincial economy. However, recent cuts to immigration outlined by the federal government in the [2025-27 Immigration Levels Plan](#) came at the expense of the provinces’ role in immigration through the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP). As a result, Alberta is likely to experience a significant reduction in its influence over immigration.

While the need to dial back immigration levels is understandable, we believe this particular decision should be reversed. And we make that case in our previous report, [Watered Down: The Case for Strengthening, Rather Than Diluting, The Province’s Role in Immigration](#).

That said, Alberta must make the most of the power that it has to deliver the promise of immigration so that new Canadians can come here from around the world and contribute to the province’s economy and society in a way that leaves all Albertans better off.

As we noted in our [first report on immigration](#), delivering the promise of immigration comes down to 1) selecting those who bring the greatest value to the economy and 2) putting all newcomers in a position to succeed.

To this end, we see two key opportunities for Alberta:

1. Enhancing its PNP, known as the Alberta Advantage Immigration Program (AAIP); and
2. Leading the way in better and faster recognition of foreign credentials and promoting this as Alberta’s advantage.

The province itself has stated that its [vision of immigration](#) is to “achieve greater economic opportunity for all Albertans.” This is how we think that should be done.

## *The success of immigration in Alberta*

Delivering prosperity through immigration isn’t just about selecting the best candidates for Alberta. It also requires that nearly every facet of government respond to the growing and changing needs of the population—from health care and public schools to housing, transit, and essential infrastructure.

It means meeting the needs not just of primary applicants selected through the PNP but those of their families, and other immigrants to Alberta as well, no matter their stream of immigration. Otherwise, opportunity for all Albertans, especially recent immigrants and other vulnerable groups, will be squandered by crowded classrooms, waitlist for doctors, or unaffordable housing.



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# Part 1: Enhancing the Alberta Advantage Immigration Program

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# Enhancing the Alberta Advantage Immigration Program

As first noted in our [background report](#) on the AAIP released in 2023, the province has excelled in attracting and retaining economic immigrants. In fact, the AAIP is one of the strongest programs across Canada in that regard.

The AAIP has also proven its ability to quickly evolve to meet changing needs. Over the last few years, it has successfully introduced a range of new streams and pathways in support of various policy priorities (e.g., entrepreneurs, law enforcement, and industries such as health care, technology, and tourism and hospitality). Likewise, it has changed various selection criteria in an effort to support greater newcomer success (e.g., having a sibling already living in Alberta). Most importantly and recently, it announced a new method for ranking candidates applying through the province’s worker-focused streams of immigration.

Nonetheless, there are big opportunities to enhance the program to deliver greater prosperity for Alberta. Many of the same challenges common to other PNPs are also true of the AAIP as well—from objectives that are not always clear or measured, to containing immigration streams that overlap with federal programs. As well, the number of [prospective immigrants interested](#) in Alberta dwarfs the number of nominations the province holds. With nominations likely to decline significantly in the coming years, this challenge is set to grow. The recently introduced ranking system will help to select the best candidates, but we believe even more can be done to ensure Alberta chooses the best of the best with the limited nominations it has. Now is the time to build on the strengths of the current program to make it even better.



## **BCA's background report on the Alberta Advantage Immigration Program**

In 2023, the BCA conducted extensive research into the Alberta Advantage Immigration Program, and published a report on its findings. This report outlined Alberta's immigration strategy; the criteria for nomination across its streams (including both worker and entrepreneur streams); and included an initial assessment of the program's success.

Some key findings from that work include:

- The AAIP primarily allocates nominations to workers who can fill short-term labour needs.
- The program responds to employer needs based on available data and stakeholder input.
- Key focuses include jobs in healthcare, tech, agriculture, construction, and hospitality.
- The program has excelled in attracting and retaining economic immigrants.
- Its ability to meet longer-term labour market needs or generate prosperity is less clear.

### **What's changed since then**

Since that work was completed, a few things have affected Alberta's current situation or future opportunity for immigration:

- The province's advantage in housing affordability has continued to attract people from across Canada and the world, as the population continues to grow like never before.
- The number of temporary residents remains high thanks to the expansion of the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP) post-pandemic, an influx of individuals from Ukraine, and growth in international students in recent years—many of whom are expected to apply for permanent residency.
- The federal government announced a new target to shrink this group down to 5% of Canada's population over the next few years by tightening restrictions on the TFWP; putting a cap on study permits for international students; and transitioning more temporary residents to permanent residency, all of which will decrease migration to Alberta.
- Pressure on the housing stock and public services from migration has led the province to express concern for its ability to support additional population growth.
- The federal government announced a sharp cut in immigration targets for both temporary and permanent residents in its 2025-27 Immigration Levels Plan. This includes a more than 50% reduction in the size of the PNP.

For the AAIP specifically, there have been several important changes as well:

- The introduction of a Tourism and Hospitality Stream, meant to “enable Alberta businesses in this sector to attract and retain needed workers, which will strengthen and grow our economy.”
- The creation of a new pathway for Law Enforcement within the Express Entry Stream, “committed to protecting the safety and security of Albertans by supporting Alberta police services' international police officer recruitment.”
- The implementation of a Worker Expression of Interest (EOI) Points Grid that ranks candidates applying through any of the immigration streams targeting workers.

## ***The Alberta Advantage Immigration Strategy sets a vision for success—but could benefit from clearer objectives that inform its strategy***

The Alberta government published a strategy for immigration in February 2022: the [Alberta Advantage Immigration \(AAI\) Strategy](#). This strategy sets out a vision for the AAIP; defines key principles for the program informed by feedback from Albertans (including newcomers and stakeholder organizations); and outlines “guideposts” or priority areas that the Ministry has identified to improve immigration.

The vision of the AAI Strategy is: “to achieve greater economic opportunity for all Albertans by attracting immigrants to Alberta in response to provincial labour market needs and supporting newcomers in reaching their full potential in our province.”

While it is encouraging to see this strategy laid out, both the vision and principles lack essential information needed to evaluate its effectiveness, or that of the AAIP more broadly. For instance, beyond this high-level vision and an acknowledgement of the importance of data in decision making (“evidence-based decision making” is listed as one of the key principles), there is no further information on what evidence will be used, how it will inform future decisions, or even how we will know if the program or its individual streams are successful.

Likewise, the underlying “guideposts” or priority areas the Ministry has identified to improve immigration are vague. While all priority areas are commendable, they fall short of offering the detail necessary to truly understand the program’s priorities or evaluate its success.

### ***The Alberta Advantage Immigration Strategy identifies six guideposts to enhance immigration to the province and achieve its vision:***

- Creating more jobs and opportunities
- Fairness for newcomers
- Fostering newcomer success in Alberta communities
- Supporting immigration to rural communities
- Engaging partners
- Securing fairness for our province

For instance, the priority area of “creating more jobs and opportunities” states that the new system will be “more responsive to the labour force needs of employers and industry and will help to address skills shortages in Alberta.” While important, this has been a stated priority for many years. With this information alone, it is unclear what, if anything, is changing; or how the Ministry will know it has been successful.

Overall, the AAI strategy seems to be heavily informed by stakeholder input but is less clear about how it measures immigrant outcomes or economic results. Some provinces—including B.C., Ontario, and Newfoundland & Labrador—have begun to develop clearly defined performance indicators to fill this gap but Alberta has not. Absent public reporting on measured outcomes, there is a lack of accountability to immigrants or Albertans.

## ***The AAIP must select a small number of people from a wide pool of talent***

Another challenge is that the amount of interest in the AAIP dwarfs the number of spots available (which currently sits at just 9,750). In March of 2024, the province wrote a [letter to the federal government](#) noting that Alberta's allocation of PNP spots was not only well short of the 14,000 requested, but that it also represented a shrinking share of total nominations. Looking ahead, Alberta's nominations are likely to see a significant reduction and could even be cut by more than half.

It's worth noting that rapid population growth from new international and inter-provincial migrants has complicated the situation, straining housing markets and public services. Specifically, the province has [stated](#) it is not able to support additional asylum seekers, without commensurate funding from the federal government, and has [raised concerns](#) regarding the overall number of temporary residents more broadly.

However, these concerns are not necessarily incompatible with [Alberta seeking a larger number of nominations](#) through the PNP. As mentioned, many of the individuals nominated through the AAIP are already living in the province as temporary residents. As such, even if Alberta's allotment of PNP spots from Ottawa were to double (an unlikely possibility in the current context, to be sure), the impact on population growth would be limited. In fact, it would still decelerate as the result of other changes to reduce the number of temporary foreign workers and international students in Canada.

Demand for AAIP nominations will almost certainly continue to outstrip supply, bolstering the case for Alberta to receive more PNP spots than it does presently. That said, the fact that demand is so high also speaks to the importance of having clear and measurable objectives against which to select applicants. Until recently, Alberta had no such system in place, making it impossible to rank candidates either within or across the range of AAIP immigration streams.

That changed in September 2024 when the province announced a new mechanism called the [Worker Expression of Interest Points Grid](#) to rank candidates across streams for selection. This points grid, similar to the federal Comprehensive Ranking System (CRS), will rate all prospective immigrants coming through the AAIP's worker streams based on human capital and economic factors such as age, education, employment experience, and if a candidate has a family member in the province.



## Points Allocation in Alberta's Worker Expression of Interest Points Grid

<b>Human Capital Factors</b>	<b>Maximum Human Capital Points</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>Total Points:</b>	<b>22</b>
Highest Level of Education Completed	Maximum Points:	12
Doctorate Degree		12
Master's Degree		10
Bachelor's Degree		7
Trades Certificate/Diploma		7
Diploma/Certificate		4
Secondary School and lower		0
Location of Highest Level of Education Completed in Canada	Maximum Points:	10
Completed in AB		10
Completed in another province/territory		6
<b>Language</b>	<b>Total Points:</b>	<b>13</b>
General Language Proficiency in English (or French)	Maximum Points:	10
6 or higher		10 (8)
5		8 (5)
4		5 (3)
3 or lower		0 (0)
No language test or assessment completed		0 (0)
Bilingual Language Proficiency	Maximum points:	3
Points are awarded for scores 4 or higher in both English and French		3
<b>Work Experience</b>	<b>Total Points:</b>	<b>21</b>
Total Work Experience - Includes all experience accumulated in Canada and abroad	Maximum Points:	11
12 or more months		11
6-11 months		7
Less than 6 months		3
Work Experience in Canada	Maximum Points:	10
6 months or more work experience in Alberta		10
6 months or more work experience in another province or territory in Canada (not Alberta)		6
<b>Age</b>	<b>Total Points:</b>	<b>5</b>
18-20		3
21-34		5
35-49		4
50 years and older		3
<b>Family Connection in AB</b>	<b>Total Points:</b>	<b>8</b>
Family member in Alberta who is a Canadian citizen or permanent resident (18+)		8
<b>Economic Factors</b>	<b>Maximum Economic Points</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>AB Job offer</b>	<b>Total Points:</b>	<b>16</b>
Full-time employment	Maximum Points:	10
Job offer to work in select Alberta rural communities or sectors:	Maximum Points:	6
Endorsement letter from a designated community in the Rural Renewal Stream		6
Job offer for the tourism and hospitality sector		6
Job offer in a law enforcement occupation		6
Job offer location	Maximum Points:	5
Calgary Census Metropolitan area		0
Edmonton Census Metropolitan area		0
Rural Renewal Stream designated community		5
Other Alberta communities (outside Edmonton, Calgary, and Rural Renewal Stream areas)		5
Job offer in a regulated occupation that meets the requirements for practice	Maximum Points:	10
Regulated professional and trade occupations governed by professional bodies		10
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>

Note: This is a simplified version of the points grid. For further details, see the official [Worker Expression of Interest Points Grid](#) via the Government of Alberta



This was an important move to ensure Alberta prioritizes the best possible candidates. Many of the factors within the points grid are proven predictors of strong economic outcomes. Also encouraging is that individuals in the trades (specifically, those who have earned a certificate or diploma) will be awarded points on par with those who have a bachelor's degree. This was a good move for two reasons. First, it targets an occupation group that Alberta strongly needs; and second, it exploits a weakness in the federal system—points awarded through the CRS tend to favour academic candidates over those with experience in the trades.

Nonetheless, there are several opportunities to further improve Alberta's system of selection to ensure it identifies the best of the best for immigration.

### **Increasing the weight of economic factors in the points grid**

For instance, the newly introduced system strongly prioritizes human capital factors over economic ones, despite the latter being a better gauge of an individual's ability to meet the needs of the provincial economy. In fact, this balance appears to be the most strongly tilted to human capital factors of any large province with a points system.

### **Awarding more points to higher earners**

As well, the best known predictor of economic success—current earnings—is missing from the EOI Points Grid. Including it would not only benefit Alberta directly, but because it is also excluded from the CRS points system, it adds another advantage: it would help to prioritize high-potential candidates that might be overlooked in the federal immigration system (both Ontario and BC have done this with their respective points systems).

It is also a useful measure to help to differentiate, say, a welder from a hair stylist. Earnings are typically much higher for the former (and they tend to be harder to find), but both require a trades certificate/diploma and would be awarded the same number of points under the EOI. It would also help to distinguish between a highly educated candidate who has work experience in the province but not in their field of study (which would still earn the candidate points for experience) versus one who has proven their ability to apply their skills in the local labour market.

### Removing points for factors that have little bearing on economic outcomes

At the same time, the EOI awards points for having a family member in Alberta. While this could be important in a province with a lot of attrition (those with family ties may be more likely to stay), this is not an issue in Alberta where 80 to 90% of immigrants remain in the province five years after arriving. Furthermore, research conducted federally—specifically, on the sibling relationship—has not shown a link between the presence of family and stronger economic outcomes. Including family connections in the provincial points system therefore provides little benefit while potentially resulting in other potentially valuable candidates being overlooked.

### Removing the bias towards those in regulated professions

Finally, as it stands today, the points grid prioritizes those in regulated professions. It gives 10 additional points for individuals who meet the requirements needed to practice in a regulated profession (like a pharmacist, social worker, or insurance broker, for example). That’s on top of the 10 points they would have already received for having a job offer for permanent, full-time employment. In other words, those coming to Alberta with a job offer in a regulated profession receive 20 points, while those coming to work in another high-demand (but unregulated) profession would only receive half as many.

## Rural immigration contributes to broadly positive economic outcomes, but there are some data gaps

Settling immigrants in rural communities is a priority for Alberta. This is evident in the AAI Strategy, the focus of existing immigration streams, and the newly introduced EIO Points Grid. In fact, three of the 8 streams within the AAIP—or what amounts to around 20% of nominations—target immigration to rural areas.

Requirements for permanent residency for those immigrating through the rural-focused streams tend to be more limited compared to other streams of immigration (e.g., the Rural Renewal Stream requires little beyond a job offer and an endorsement from the given community). Likewise, the new points grid awards additional points to candidates with job offers in designated communities beyond Edmonton and Calgary. This suggest that an important consideration of Alberta’s immigrant selection process is supporting economic development and population growth broadly across the province rather than simply selecting individuals with the most highly valued skills.



That said, immigrants to more rural areas seem to do quite well. [Census data](#) suggests economic outcomes of AAIP applicants (based on median wages of various cohorts a few years after landing) living outside Alberta's big cities have been as strong as, or even slightly stronger, than those in Edmonton or Calgary.

But more data is needed. For instance, we do not know if there are regional differences in how AAIP immigrants fare in smaller communities. Anyone settling outside of Calgary, Edmonton or Lethbridge gets lumped into a single region. We don't know if AAIP immigrant outcomes are better in Grande Prairie, Lloydminster, or Pincher Creek or if these results vary based on the skill type, level, or occupation of immigrants.

Another consideration is that immigrant retention tends to be lower in rural communities. It's possible that these economic outcomes only represent the subset of immigrants who chose to stay.

More importantly, the AAIP and its interest in settling immigrants broadly across the province have both been expanded in recent years. But it's too soon to determine if regional economic outcomes for AAIP applicants have been impacted as well (the latest available data is 2021 for the 2020 cohort). Individuals settling beyond Alberta's big cities are starting out with higher earnings, but this may reflect a greater likelihood of being already in the province and employed at the time of landing.

## Alberta's new points grid system improves candidate selection, but gaps in measurable outcomes and economic prioritization highlight opportunities to better align immigration with provincial needs.



### *There is heavy overlap between the AAIP and federal programs and strategies*

The AAI Strategy notes a key objective of engagement with the federal government is to “make the system more responsive to the unique needs of Alberta” which would seem to imply that those needs are distinct from federal priorities.

However, recent developments suggest heavy overlap between the two. The stated priorities of the AAIP are remarkably similar to those in the federal government's recently introduced category-based approach to immigration.

Specifically, five of the federal government's six priority categories for immigrant selection overlap with the provincial government's own stated sectors of focus (healthcare, agriculture, construction, tech, and transportation). Not to mention the broader overlap between Alberta's rural immigration focus and Ottawa's Rural Community Immigration Pilot.

As such, the AAIP likely competes with federal programs for people. As stated in our [previous report](#), there is room for the federal government to adjust its strategy to limit this overlap.

There is much the province can do to address this issue as well. For one, it can seek to identify immigration candidates overlooked in the federal selection process and take advantage of additional intelligence not available or used federally (e.g., current earnings, intended occupation, provincial labour demand and supply projections, etc.).

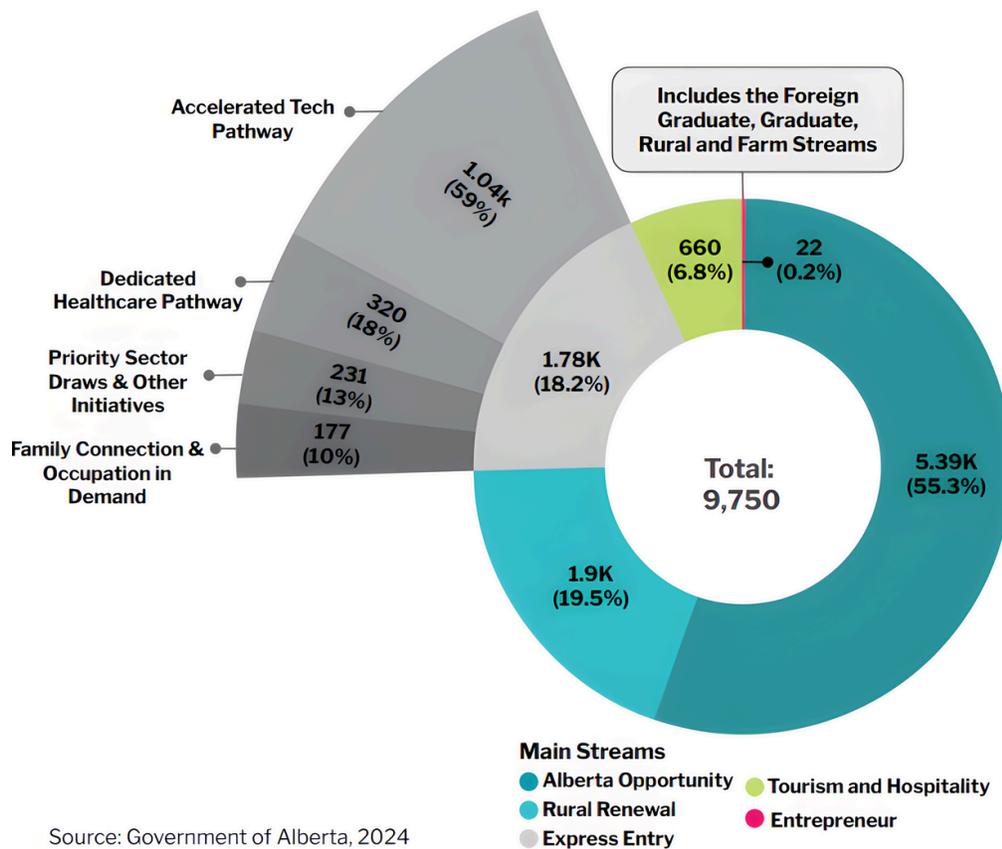
As well, there is an important role for Alberta, together with other provinces, to advocate to the federal government in cases where the pool of talent is simply too small. For example, if the pool of qualified candidates is not large enough to meet demand for health care workers across Canada, the federal government could support building that pool through a national recruitment effort.

## The large range of niche programs in the AAIP can make it difficult to navigate and inefficient to administer

As stated in the latest AAI Strategy, “overall, processes in the immigration system are perceived to be too complex.” To its credit, improving the administrative agility of the AAIP is a top priority for the Alberta government. The strategy lists “continuous improvement and efficiency” as a key principle of the program, with the specific goal of limiting costs to taxpayers.

However, as with other PNPs across Canada, Alberta’s is highly fragmented. As an example, there are four entrepreneur-related streams which resulted in a total of nine nominations in 2024. As well, newly identified occupational needs often lead to the creation of new immigration streams, such as the case with the recently announced program for recruiting individuals in law enforcement. While new needs may warrant a new stream, over time, more streams tend to be added than the number retired. This can make it more cumbersome for prospective nominees to navigate the AAIP and more complex for the ministry to administer.

### AAIP expected nominations by stream



To be sure, the intent of the PNP is to be highly adaptable to changing need. However, the sheer number of streams can also decrease its agility and sophistication.

To this end, retiring streams whose success is not proven, or whose role is no longer needed, is essential. Furthermore, to the extent possible, refinement of selection criteria within larger “primary” streams may be preferable to adding new streams that increase overall program cost and complexity.

What is currently lacking from the present approach is a process to systematically review the effectiveness of individual streams. This should include an assessment of economic outcomes by stream to determine which are most effective and which should be retired to minimize the overall complexity of the system.

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# Policy Recommendations to Enhance the AAIP

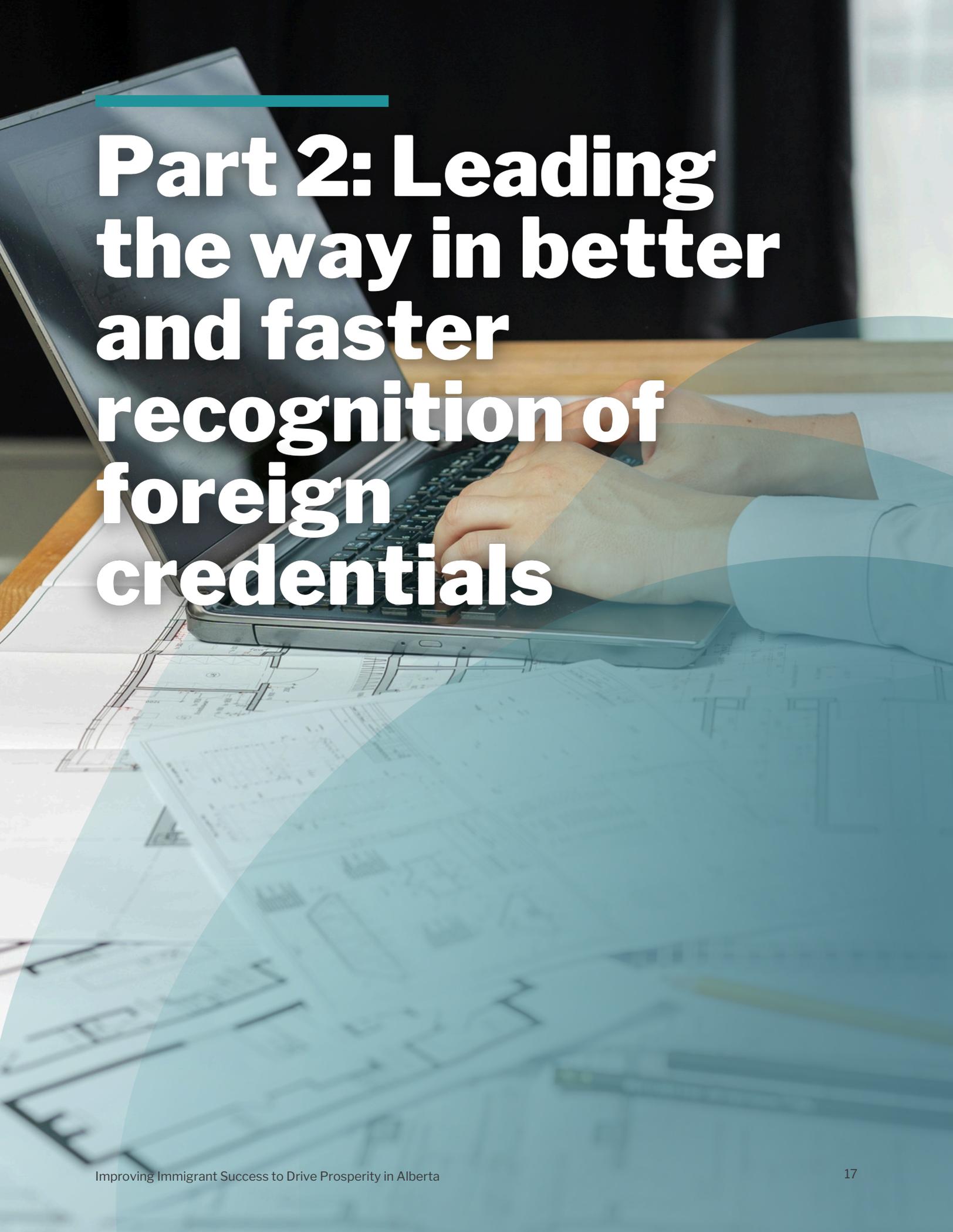
Prosperity-driven immigration is about selecting those most likely to make a significant contribution to the Alberta economy. The AAIP offers a huge opportunity to maximize that contribution. Not only is there a case for Alberta to receive a larger proportion of PNP spaces from the federal government, but there is also an opportunity to improve selection from within the existing pool of nominees. In fact, in some ways, the latter is more important than the former: selecting the right individuals for economic immigration to Alberta, and putting them in a position to succeed, is what will ultimately achieve “greater economic opportunity for all Albertans” as expressed in the vision of the AAI Strategy.

If done well, Alberta could create a virtuous cycle of economic growth and prosperity with its immigration policy. The stronger the candidates it attracts, and the better their outcomes, the more top-quality candidates will want to come here. Through a truly prosperity-driven strategy for immigration, Alberta can be the top destination where immigrants from all over the world want to come and choose to stay.

To generate greater prosperity through the AAIP, we recommend that the province consider the following:

- 1.** Advocate to the federal government for an increase in nominations in line with Alberta’s stronger economic outcomes and greater absorptive capacity (as outlined in the PNP recommendations in *Watered Down: The Case for Strengthening, Rather Than Diluting, The Provinces’ Role in Immigration*). If economic outcomes and/or absorptive capacity are further improved, this should be reflected in future increases to the province’s allocation of nominees.
- 2.** Create clear, objective economic success metrics for principal AAIP applicants to assess the success of the AAIP. This should include a measure of how well applicants fare relative to the general population (e.g., median wages and employment rates) as well as the regional distribution of applicants across the province.
- 3.** Similar to *BC’s Statistical Report and Year in Review*, publish economic success metrics (as outlined in recommendation 2) as part of a regular review of the program to inform future policy. To the extent possible, performance outcomes should be published for each stream to ensure they meet overarching policy goals.
- 4.** Review and refresh program priorities every 4 or 5 years in coordination with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Advanced Education, and the Ministry of Jobs, Economy, and Trade as a part of a broader strategy on workforce development. This process should:
  - a.** Consider any important changes to the economic environment, competitive landscape, or sectors of the economy that could necessitate a shift.
  - b.** Evaluate if strategies to attract and develop talent are working together and to what extent both can be improved.
- 5.** Refine the *Worker Expression of Interest (EOI) Points Grid* to further enhance selection of provincial nominees. The goal should be to ensure that points are awarded in a way that prioritizes individuals most likely to succeed and generate strong returns for the Alberta economy. Specifically, the points grid should be adjusted to:



A person's hands are shown typing on a laptop keyboard. The laptop is open, and the keyboard is visible. Below the laptop, there are several sheets of architectural blueprints spread out on a desk. The background is slightly blurred, showing a window and some office equipment. The overall scene is professional and focused on work.

# Part 2: Leading the way in better and faster recognition of foreign credentials

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# Leading the way in better and faster recognition of foreign credentials

To generate prosperity, newcomers to Alberta must be able to fully utilize their skills in the local labour market. Unfortunately, many struggle to do so, especially those in professions that are regulated by provincial regulatory bodies. Among other obstacles such as cultural bias and language proficiency, they often discover that their credentials are not recognized in Alberta and, as a result, are frequently left un-or under-employed, a huge loss to those individuals, and to the province at large.

Though no estimates are available for Alberta specifically, previous research has shown that if international credentials were better recognized across Canada, newcomers would collectively earn as much as \$17 billion more annually.

There are many things that the federal government can do to help (as we detailed in *Delivering the Promise*), but there are limits. Because provinces have jurisdiction over regulated professions, implementing a single, uniform solution Canada-wide may not be realistic.

But Alberta has the power to move the needle. And, as provinces compete to attract top talent, this is a huge opportunity to harness.

Alberta has already made progress, but much more is needed to ensure newcomers do not face a long wait, high cost, or extensive retraining before they can work in their chosen field. The provincial government is aware of this problem and has recently established a Foreign Credential Advisory Committee to evaluate the existing system and offer recommendations for improvement. Likewise, it recently announced an agreement with Ontario to support a framework for collaboration between the two provinces on international credential recognition and post-journeyperson certification.

Additionally, Alberta has taken steps to foster greater collaboration across various ministries and with a diverse range of stakeholders to better support newcomers more broadly. For instance, the Alberta government recently hosted the annual Premier's Summit on Fairness for Newcomers, bringing together individuals from both the private and public sectors who are dedicated to ensuring that Alberta remains one of the world's most desirable destinations for newcomers.

That said, there is much more that could be done. To fully address the issue, and create an Alberta Advantage in foreign credential recognition, requires a deep understanding of the problem and its components. Below, we detail each of these components, followed by the steps that Alberta can take to lead the way.



**Improving credential recognition for newcomers presents Alberta with a unique opportunity to attract top talent, boost prosperity, and lead Canada in supporting the integration of skilled immigrants.**

## ***There is insufficient pre-arrival information readily available on the process of foreign credential recognition***

The first issue is that many applicants for immigration simply do not know that their credentials will not allow them to practice in Alberta.

Newcomers often lack clear information on whether their profession is regulated and, if it is, what the process is to gain recognition. Though data is unavailable provincially, a 2019 study found that about half of economic immigrants to Canada were unaware that there were regulatory barriers to practicing in their profession, even though many of these individuals were selected for immigration specifically because of their skills.

Because licensing requirements and credential recognition pathways vary across the country, immigrants need provincial-level information on the process based on where they plan to settle; how long the process will take; and, to the extent possible, the likelihood that their credentials will be recognized in their chosen province.

Currently, most pre-arrival information and support is provided by IRCC. Although it is working to provide better information to economic immigrants, IRCC does not provide province-specific details in this area.

Alberta has addressed the issue in some AAIP streams, such as the AAIP Dedicated Healthcare Pathway, simply by incorporating credential recognition directly into the immigration process. To enter the province on this pathway, individuals are only selected if their credentials are first recognized by an Alberta regulatory body.

As well, the province now emphasizes the importance of recognized credentials within its Worker Expression of Interest (EOI) Points Grid—the new mechanism to rank and select prospective candidates for immigration from the AAIP mentioned above. Additional points are awarded to those with a job offer in a regulated profession who meet regulatory requirements to practice in Alberta.

That said, though it is a requirement in certain streams and is emphasized in the points grid for selection, the challenge persists for many. Many prospective immigrants will still not have the information they need to start the credential recognition process and will end up spending more time in Alberta waiting before practicing, if they end up being able to practice at all.

## ***The credential recognition process is often lengthy and complex***

Even when newcomers know the first steps toward credential recognition, many find the process to be lengthy and burdensome. Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) has identified long and complex accreditation processes as a common barrier to employment for internationally trained individuals.

Data on this issue in Alberta is limited, but anecdotal evidence suggests it's a problem all across Canada. For instance, a report by the Government of British Columbia highlighted that many newcomers report facing multiple language tests during the immigration, settlement, and licensure process. This requirement can lead to increased financial burden and further delays in getting credentials recognized.

It's important to note that provincial governments do not typically play a role in assessing credentials directly. They do, however, play a role in ensuring that the regulatory bodies performing that function adhere to the principles of transparency, consistency, timeliness, and fairness.

In Alberta, this is done through the Fair Registration Practices Act (FRPA). This legislation states that regulatory bodies are required to complete initial assessments (known as the “interim registration decision”) within six months and provide a written reason for their decision within a “reasonable time.” But while this legislation provides broad guidelines, it lacks key details and components that could better support immigrant success.

Other provinces show there is more that can be done. Saskatchewan imposes strict timelines, requiring that written assessment decisions by regulatory bodies be made within 50 business days and that those bodies provide both a detailed explanation of their reasoning and a path of remediation (next steps required), in the event credentials are not recognized.

Likewise, British Columbia minimizes additional hurdles in the process. Specifically, the International Credentials Recognition Act states that regulatory bodies cannot require additional English language testing if valid results submitted as part of an application expire before the regulator makes their certification decision. It also requires that all information regarding credentialing must be published online, to increase transparency for current and prospective applicants.

Along the same lines, Ontario has introduced legislation that eliminates Canadian work experience requirements in the assessment and licencing process unless an exemption is granted based on a demonstrated public health and safety risk.

As well, there are lessons that Alberta can apply from its own Labour Mobility Act which applies to domestic out-of-province workers. This legislation implements maximum timelines (e.g., a maximum number of days) to ensure prompt assessments for these workers. By extending these practices to the foreign credential process, Alberta could further improve efficiency and alignment with best practices seen in other provinces.



## Foreign credential recognition across provinces

As a part of our research on improving Foreign Credential Recognition in Alberta, we wanted to understand what best practices are in place to support better and faster credential recognition across some of Canada's largest provinces.

Throughout this research, we identified three common themes that guide policy decisions in provinces that have made the most progress on improving foreign credential recognition and serve as a foundation for driving change. They include:

- **Building accountability within government** – Someone is responsible for ensuring progress on improving existing processes.
- **Ensuring smart and timely decisions by regulatory bodies** – Clear expectations are set for regulatory bodies to ensure applicants receive timely and helpful information and that credentials are assessed and recognized as quickly and effectively as possible.
- **Removing unnecessary barriers to licensing** – Practices of regulatory bodies are assessed to ensure that existing processes and candidate requirements (e.g., Canadian experience or additional language testing) are fair and necessary.

More specifically, we identified five policies that have been implemented across multiple provinces. While no province has adopted all five of these policies, the majority have legislated at least one of the following:

- **There is a designated Superintendent of Foreign Credential Recognition.** The Superintendent is solely responsible for overseeing the improvement of foreign credential recognition practices in a province, including: ensuring regulatory bodies comply with legislation; addressing systemic or general barriers to credential recognition; and establishing best practices.
- **Maximum timelines are in place for final assessment decisions.** Provinces mandate a specific maximum number of days for regulatory bodies to complete assessment decisions.
- **Regulatory bodies are required to provide a detailed mediation pathway for individuals whose credentials are not accepted.** This requires them to clearly specify the next steps needed to meet licensing requirements for individuals whose credentials are often not accepted within a set timeframe.
- **Canadian experience requirements have been removed for the purpose of licensing.** If educational credentials are recognized, regulatory bodies cannot require Canadian experience requirements except for health and safety reasons.
- **Redundant English language testing requirements are not required.** Regulatory bodies are only able to ask for proof of language skills once within a reasonable amount of time (typically, a set number of years).

Importantly, no province has fully implemented all of these measures. This presents a significant opportunity for Alberta. By adopting these policies, Alberta could gain a clear competitive advantage, positioning itself as a leader in foreign credential recognition and sending a strong message to skilled newcomers that Alberta is the ideal place to build their careers.

## ***The process is rigid and lacks the sophistication required***

Finally, the decisions themselves on whether to recognize credentials can be problematic. They are made based on limited information and, typically, without an opportunity for the individual in question to prove their skill or seek support on the path to recognition.

Specifically, decisions can be influenced by a variety of factors, including the country of education, program length, specific courses completed, the number of practice hours, and many other factors. While extensive, assessments ultimately lack perfect information about an individual and their capabilities. Some qualified individuals may face delays of several months or even be rejected simply because their program has never been assessed for equivalency. For example, a person with credentials from a lesser-known or smaller school may have to wait many months—all to potentially receive a no—while a regulatory body reviews the school’s curriculum.

Furthermore, as discussed in [previous research](#), because the primary goal of the regulatory body is to assure a standard of service for the profession, if ever in doubt, they are more likely to err on the side of “no.”

One option to address this problem is to review each international program. There have been pockets of progress to this end. For instance, the [College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta](#) (CPSA) publishes a document outlining how various jurisdictions and educational institutions compare for licensing purposes. In some cases, international credentials are seen as fully equivalent.

But this comparison and verification process can be costly and time consuming; and it may not be reasonable for every profession and program. Rather than reviewing each institution individually, a better approach would be to offer a competency-based assessment upon arrival. This could involve a written exam that assesses technical skills and practical knowledge required for a profession, and/or an opportunity to demonstrate one’s abilities in a real-world setting—as is already being done for [nursing occupations](#) in Alberta. This approach more accurately evaluates an individual’s abilities, regardless of where they learned or practiced. But to date, this is not an approach that is widely used across regulated professions.

Another issue is that, when credentials are not recognized, there is little support in the path to practicing in Alberta. As mentioned above, legislation can help to ensure regulators are held accountable for sharing information on the next steps to recognition. But more support may be needed beyond a simple written response.

Some regulatory bodies and associations have stepped up to offer additional support. For instance, [The Alberta Teachers Association](#) supports international applicants all the way through the licensing process, providing coaching and assisting with job-related issues.

But there may be an opportunity to apply this practice more broadly. For instance, the government of Saskatchewan has established a program that connects internationally trained individuals with a team of “navigators.” The team serve as liaisons with regulatory bodies and internationally trained professionals by connecting those seeking assistance with the appropriate regulatory body. Additionally, the team assists newcomers in their initial steps in getting connected with the correct regulatory body, as well as any difficulties they may face along the credentialing process. As such, information gathered from client experiences is also helpful in identifying any areas of improvement needed in the process overall (e.g., any barriers to licensing; challenges with bridging programs; or miscommunication along the way).





**By implementing robust policies like competency-based assessments and removing unnecessary barriers, Alberta can lead in credential recognition, ensuring skilled newcomers contribute fully to the provincial economy.**

### ***Supporting further progress on credential recognition***

It's worth noting that supporting *further* and continuous progress comes down to developing and implementing a good strategy informed by data. Provinces that place a strong emphasis on collecting and reporting important outcomes and objectives, and refining their strategies accordingly, will ensure that skilled individuals aren't left on the sidelines. Though most provinces do this to some degree, this is what we see as the best practices when it comes to data collection and reporting:

- **Mandatory annual reporting by individual regulatory bodies.** This would allow provincial governments to collect data on key quantitative metrics, including: average and median registration processing times across various pathways; the cost of licensing for internationally-trained individuals; the top countries from which individuals obtain their education; and application processing outcomes, including an assessment of acceptance rates across domestic and foreign-trained individuals.
- **Annual progress report on Foreign Credential Recognition.** This provincial government report would assess current efforts to improve the foreign credential recognition process based on data collected from regulatory bodies and measuring those results against clearly defined objectives. The report would also outline a detailed plan for future improvements.

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## **Policy Recommendations to Improve Foreign Credential Recognition**

By addressing these areas, Alberta can better support newcomers, giving them a higher chance of fully utilizing their skills, and contributing to the province's growth and success. More than that, it would create a major competitive advantage for the province. Provinces and regulatory bodies with the most seamless process stand to attract more foreign-trained immigrants with valuable skills for their labour market.

Improvements are needed across the full continuum of the credential recognition issue: from the low-hanging fruit of better communication when prospective immigrants first apply for permanent residency; all the way to the taller order of offering newcomers to Alberta a way to prove their skills.

Alberta has made progress in several areas, but it also has a lot to learn from other provinces which have charged ahead in this space, from personalizing support for newcomers to more ambitious requirements for regulators. Specifically, we recommend that the province consider the following:

- 1.** Explore opportunities to coordinate with the federal government to provide pre-arrival information for those planning to settle in Alberta, such as tailored information on credential recognition and settlement support. This will ensure immigrants know what is required and help to get the process started long before landing.
- 2.** Remove regulatory bodies' ability to require Canadian experience for internationally trained individuals for credentialing, unless an exemption for health and safety reasons is granted. Alberta should adopt an approach similar to that taken by Ontario and British Columbia to ensure equal opportunities for skilled immigrants.
- 3.** Remove regulatory bodies' ability to require additional English language testing if valid, current results have already been submitted for the purpose of immigration or prior credential assessments.
- 4.** Amend the Fair Registration Practices Act to ensure newcomers can utilize their skills quickly and easily. Specific changes to this legislation should include:
  - a.** Maximum processing timelines (as measured by a maximum number of days) for regulatory bodies to conduct the final assessment that are comparable to, or faster than, other provinces with timelines in place.
  - b.** Maximum timelines for regulatory bodies to provide detailed reasoning in the case of rejection.
  - c.** Maximum timelines for regulatory bodies to provide a detailed mediation pathway, outlining the next steps needed to satisfy licencing requirements.
  - d.** More extensive reporting requirements. Although regulatory bodies are already required under the FRPA to submit annual reports, there is an opportunity to make these reports more comprehensive and data-driven. Using the registration data reports done in Manitoba as a guide, they should include the average time to complete licensing requirements and costs for internationally trained individuals seeking licensure; the number of international applicants processed each year; the top five countries where credentials are earned; and the acceptance rate of domestic and foreign-trained applicants. This data should be used both to ensure compliance as well as to assess progress in improving foreign credential recognition.



- 5.** Develop and publish an Alberta Advantage Dashboard on the [Alberta Learning Information Service \(ALIS\) Resources for Newcomers](#) webpage to highlight Alberta's advantages with respect to the Foreign Credential Recognition (FCR) process and work in regulated professions. The dashboard could include metrics such as average processing times for licensing; labour demand in regulated professions; and the number of internationally trained individuals currently working in regulated professions, among others. This dashboard could also help those new to Alberta navigate to other important information and resources related to licensing.
- 6.** Launch an International Credentials Comparison Initiative to evaluate credentials from the top ten source countries of newcomers to Alberta against provincial requirements. Prioritize regulated occupations that are in high and growing demand according to labour market information. This information should be posted on the Alberta Advantage Immigration Program webpage and be distributed to IRCC to send to prospective applicants.
- 7.** Commit to publishing a Foreign Credential Recognition: Progress and Priorities report annually. This report should track measurable outcomes against which the province plans to assess progress and identify areas for improvement (e.g., number of clients served and the number of credential acceptances and rejections).
- 8.** Using best practices in BC as a model, appoint a Superintendent of Foreign Credential Recognition whose sole responsibility is to improve foreign credential recognition in Alberta. Specifically, this role should:
  - a.** Be a position that oversees the fair recognition of credentials and works to address systemic or procedural issues.
  - b.** Be responsible for publishing the abovementioned annual report evaluating Alberta's progress in foreign credential recognition.
  - c.** Be limited to a five-year mandate to enact change so that this position is not needed indefinitely.
- 9.** The Ministry of Immigration and Multiculturalism should assess the effectiveness of different programs aimed at bridging immigrants' current skills and education with what is required for practice in Alberta. This process should be conducted through targeted focus groups with both individuals who have successfully completed these programs and those who have not. Gathering feedback from these participants will help identify challenges and guide future initiatives to streamline and accelerate workforce integration for newcomers.
- 10.** Develop a dedicated team of individuals within the Alberta government who serve as a liaison for Albertans who need help getting their credentials recognized (modeled after Saskatchewan's "navigator" program). This team would connect newcomers with the relevant regulatory body or support services. An additional benefit of such a team is that it would offer a better line of sight into where the difficulties and confusion lie in the process and identify areas for improvement to create a more efficient and streamlined experience for skilled newcomers.



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