



2024 Federal Pre-budget Consultations

Written Submission from World Education Services (WES) August 2023

About WES

World Education Services (WES) is a non-profit social enterprise dedicated to helping international students, immigrants, and refugees achieve their educational and career goals in Canada and the United States. For more than 45 years, WES has set the standard of excellence in the field of international academic credential evaluation. Through WES Global Talent Bridge, the organization joins with institutional partners, community-based organizations, and policymakers to help immigrants and refugees who hold international credentials fully utilize their talents and education to achieve their academic and professional goals. Through its grant making, impact investing, and partnerships, the WES Mariam Assefa Fund seeks to advance economic and social inclusion for immigrants and refugees. Since 2013, WES has been a designated provider of Educational Credential Assessments (ECAs) for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

WES is pleased to provide input in the federal pre-budget consultations process. Below are our recommendations to help shape the preparation of a budget that is responsive to the needs of newcomers.

Summary of Recommendations

Invest in projects and settlement services to build immigrant-inclusive economy and communities

- Increase funding toward non-market-based housing initiatives to increase availability of affordable housing options to support newcomers.
- Increase funding allocations in an ongoing manner to provincial governments and municipalities to ensure comprehensive and timely delivery of settlement services, including shelter services, to meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers.
- Provide federal incentives that support procurement models, such as Community Benefits Agreements, that can drive local economies and provide social and economic benefits for all, including newcomers.
- Implement tax incentives for small and medium enterprises to encourage immigrant recruitment and retention, ensuring that Canada benefits from increased immigration targets.

Rebuild the health care workforce by ensuring the professional integration of immigrant health professionals

- Invest in the measures to facilitate the professional integration of international educated doctors and nurses, contained in the yet unpublished IEHP Blueprint developed by Health Canada in the fall of 2022, by prioritizing:

- measures that expediate immigration processes, licensure, and workforce inclusion pathways for IEHPs,
- the collection of comprehensive data on IEHPs, including their fields of study and current occupations in Canada
- Work with provinces and territories by:
 - providing funding to enhance the availability of nurse bridging programs and to streamline pathways to practice through nationwide expansion of the **Supervised Practice Experience Partnership** model,
 - reassessing the eligibility criteria for practice-ready assessment (PRA) program offered in eight provinces to eliminate criteria that systemically exclude internationally trained physicians with demonstrated competence and experience
- Ensure the additional federal transfers (\$25 million over 10 years) to the provinces and territories require targeted inclusion of IEHPs into the health care workforce.

Address the needs of international students and Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP) holders

- Ensure eligibility and access for international students to government-funded Canada Summer Jobs and work-integrated learning opportunities.
- Fund student housing via the National Housing Strategy through the establishment of a federal rent assistance program and ensure conditionalities enable access for international students.
- Create streamlined pathways to permanent residency for international students and PGWP holders with comprehensive eligibility criteria.
- Increase funding for settlement services and expand their scope to include international students and PGWP holders.

Detailed Recommendations

1. Invest in projects and settlement services to build immigrant-inclusive economy and communities

Canada has a long-standing commitment to welcoming newcomers and ensuring their successful settlement and integration into Canadian society. As the country aims to welcome over **1.4 million** newcomers, including refugees and immigrants, between 2023 and 2025, it is crucial to prioritize seamless settlement and facilitate commensurate integration into the labour market, ensuring the newcomers' skills and experience are effectively utilized.

Affordable housing remains a pressing issue across the country, affecting both newcomers and long-term residents. Adequate funding toward non-market housing initiatives is essential to address the **affordable housing crises** and ensure that newcomers have access to safe and affordable housing options. This includes investing in social housing, supportive housing, and other affordable housing models tailored to meet the diverse needs of all, including newcomers.

In addition to housing, comprehensive support and resources are crucial to meet the **needs of refugees and asylum seekers** effectively. Allocating more funding to provincial governments and

municipalities will enhance their capacity to provide comprehensive and timely settlement services, including shelter and employment support services, ensuring that newcomers have the necessary resources for successful integration.

To drive local economies and maximize social and economic benefits of newcomers, it is imperative to invest in social procurement models such as **Community Benefits Agreements**. These models can leverage public infrastructure projects to create employment opportunities for newcomers and other marginalized communities, fostering economic growth and social inclusion. Similar to **existing programs**, social procurement models can adopt a cost-sharing approach, where the federal government covers one-third of the program costs and the provincial/territorial and municipal governments jointly contribute two-thirds.

Encouraging immigrant recruitment and retention in the workplace is also vital to help Canada to benefit from increased immigration targets. Implementing tax incentives for small and medium enterprises can encourage their engagement in hiring and retaining immigrant employees, recognizing the valuable skills and diversity these employees bring to the workforce. For example, the federal government can offer tax rebates to small and medium enterprises for employing newcomers.

Recommendations

- Increase funding toward **non-market-based housing initiatives** to increase availability of affordable housing options to support newcomers.
- Increase funding allocations in an ongoing manner to provincial governments and municipalities to ensure **comprehensive and timely delivery of settlement services**, including shelter services, to meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers.
- Provide federal incentives that **support procurement models, such as Community Benefits Agreements**, that can drive local economies and provide social and economic benefits for all, including newcomers.
- Implement **tax incentives for small and medium enterprises** to encourage immigrant recruitment and retention, ensuring that Canada benefits from increased immigration targets.

2. Rebuild the health care workforce by ensuring the professional integration of immigrant health professionals

Across Canada, provinces are facing **critical staffing shortages** in health care, including long-term care, and overworked health care workers are experiencing **burnout**. Thousands of internationally educated health professionals stand ready to contribute their skills and training in Canada, but too many struggle with unreasonable barriers to re-entering and advancing in their professions.

The contributions of IEHPs are vital to Canada's health system, with immigrants comprising **25.5 percent** of the health care and social assistance sector in Canada. However, **47 percent** of IEHPs, in particular racialized immigrant women, are unemployed or employed in positions that have not made full use of their skills, education, and experience.

Without a concrete plan to address the underutilization of IEHPs, the **Express Entry category-based selection draws aimed at health care workers** risk increasing the already large pool of IEHPs in Canada who cannot practice their profession.

To maximize the potential of IEHPs, it is essential to develop a cohesive pan-Canadian health care workforce strategy. This strategy should bring together relevant stakeholders, including federal, provincial, and territorial governments and regulatory bodies, to address the immigration processes, licensure requirements, and workforce inclusion pathways for IEHPs.

The strategy should also focus on collecting comprehensive data on IEHPs, including information on their fields of study, professional qualifications, and current occupations in Canada. This data will provide insights into the skills and expertise of IEHPs and enable evidence-based decision-making in developing targeted programs and policies to streamline IEHPs' inclusion in the health care workforce.

To support the professional integration of IEHPs, additional federal transfers should be allocated to the provinces and territories. These transfers should be specifically utilized to streamline the inclusion of IEHPs and enhance their integration into the health care sector.

Recommendations

- Invest in the measures to facilitate the professional integration of international educated doctors and nurses, contained in the yet unpublished **IEHP Blueprint** developed by Health Canada in the fall of 2022, by prioritizing:
 - measures that expediate **immigration processes, licensure, and workforce inclusion pathways for IEHPs**,
 - the collection of **comprehensive data on IEHPs**, including their fields of study and current occupations in Canada
- Work with provinces and territories by:
 - providing funding to enhance the availability of **nurse bridging programs** and to streamline **pathways to practice** through nationwide expansion of the **Supervised Practice Experience Partnership** model,
 - reassessing the eligibility criteria for **practice-ready assessment (PRA) program** offered in eight provinces to eliminate criteria that systemically exclude internationally trained physicians with demonstrated competence and experience
- Ensure the additional federal transfers (\$25 million over 10 years) to the provinces and territories require **targeted inclusion of IEHPs into health care workforce**.

3. Address the needs of international students and Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP) holders

Canada remains a **top destination** globally for international students because of the country's renowned education system and reputation for having an inclusive and safe society. The number of international students in Canada has **tripled** over the past decade. By the end of 2022, there were over **800,000** study permit holders, reflecting a 30 percent increase compared to the previous year.

The international student market contributes significantly to the Canadian economy and the students are a valuable talent pool. International students account for approximately **18 percent** of post-secondary enrollment in Canada, making substantial contributions of over \$22 billion to the economy annually. Their pursuit of higher education in Canada also supports more than 170,000 jobs each year.

However, media reports of international students being victims of **misinformation and fraud**, having **poor and limited housing options**, and committing suicide at **alarming rates** endanger Canada's reputation as a favoured destination for higher education.

The federal government can utilize the renewal of the **International Education Strategy** in 2024 as an opportunity to enhance protections that address student vulnerability, discourage unethical recruitment practices, and prevent the involvement of fraudulent participants in the international education sector.

A **2022 survey** from the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) showed that approximately 60 percent of international students are interested in becoming permanent residents in Canada after completing their postsecondary education. This pool of young, skilled, and motivated individuals must be set up for success if they make the decision to stay in Canada as potential immigrants. Canada needs to support them in the same way as we do with other prospective immigrants. These students need to have access to the same supports—and in some cases additional, unique supports—to facilitate their transition into the labour market and to permanent residency. This approach requires streamlining permanent residence pathways for international students and PGWP holders and providing equitable access to federally funded **settlement services**. Transition to permanent residency can take years, and international students and PGWP holders navigate the interim period with limited or no support. By the time they become eligible for settlement services, they have likely already faced the most significant barriers associated with settling in Canada.

Recommendations

- Ensure eligibility and access for international students to **government-funded Canada Summer Jobs and work-integrated learning opportunities**.
- Fund student housing via the National Housing Strategy through the establishment of a **federal rent assistance program** and ensure conditionalities enable access for international students.
- Create **streamlined pathways to permanent residency** for international students and PGWP holders with comprehensive eligibility criteria.
- Increase funding for **settlement services** and expand their scope to include international students and PGWP holders.