



MOSAIC

Together we advance an inclusive and thriving Canada.

Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

BC Budget 2022 Consultation Submission

MOSAIC

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For over 45 years, MOSAIC has been committed to improving the lives of immigrants, refugees, and temporary foreign workers throughout BC. As one of the largest providers of settlement, family, employment, language, interpretation and translation services in BC, we are proud of our long-term partnership with the Province of British Columbia. MOSAIC's mission is to enrich communities through services and advocacy, furthering the success and sense of belonging of newcomers and individuals from diverse backgrounds. We embrace the leadership role we play in delivering services that allow newcomers to reach their full capacity and be connected within the communities where they live and work.

MOSAIC commends the BC government for their inclusive approach in soliciting feedback from front-line stakeholder organizations to support people from diverse walks of life to thrive in a healthy and vibrant BC. We welcome the opportunity to share with you our evidence-based recommendations in the following areas that will improve the well-being and labour outcomes of newcomers in our province:

1. Funding for Canadian Work Experience & Training Program for Recent Immigrants
2. Permanent Emergency Support Fund for Migrant Workers and Immediate Access to MSP
3. Culturally-Safe, Low-Barrier Mental Health Services for Ethno-Cultural Communities and Newcomers

1. Funding for Canadian Work Experience & Training Program for Recent Immigrants

Over the next 3 years, Canada plans to welcome more than 1.3 million new immigrants. In British Columbia, 35% of over 1M projected job openings over the next 10 years are expected to be filled by new immigrants. The pandemic has shown us how vital immigration is to our economy and the very fabric of our society, yet less than 40% of newcomer professionals work in skills-commensurate jobs. Recent immigrants face higher unemployment rates than those born in Canada, and are more likely to work in jobs that under-utilize their education, skills and experience. While the process of recognizing foreign credentials or work experience, and systemic discrimination are two contributing factors that need to be addressed, the most significant barrier lies in the difficulty in gaining Canadian on-the-job experience, networks, and references. Research shows that the first 3 years are critical for newcomers to overcome that barrier. Given the current labour challenges, BC employers need the skills and contributions of newcomers more than ever. BC has an unprecedented opportunity to shape how new immigrants will contribute to our recovery with front-end targeted support to unlock the talent and skills we need.

Targeted funding and support will allow employers and service organizations to work together to provide newcomers with occupation-specific training for in-demand job sectors, hands-on workplace experience through internships, orientation to Canadian workplaces and mentoring. By modelling an approach after the robust framework in place to support young people in gaining work experience through co-op placements, internships, and employer incentives, BC can optimize the contribution of recent immigrants to the labour market, and provide employers with the skilled and experienced workforce they need.

Recommendation #1:

Dedicate funding to programs providing Canadian workplace experience for immigrant professionals through coops and internships which will provide hands-on experience and training in Canadian workplace culture, allowing employers to test-drive talent and improving outcomes for newcomers in obtaining skills-commensurate employment.





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2. Emergency Support for Migrant Workers through Permanent Emergency Fund and Immediate Access to MSP

Migrant workers are essential to Canada's economy, filling over 400,000 jobs across the country, with agricultural workers being the most significant category in BC. The announcement of the Workforce Solutions Road Map by the federal government signalled increasing focus on the contributions of migrant workers to our economy, and the need to better support them through increased assistance in emergency and at-risk situations.

Many migrant workers arrive in BC through a closed work permit, and can face higher levels of exploitation. Some examples of unanticipated financial hardship are wage loss when leaving an abusive employer or due to environmental disasters (floods, wildfires), or because of emergency dental expenses. Emergency, accessible funding is critical to fill the gaps and support migrant workers who must navigate these challenging situations. MOSAIC has launched a pilot project to provide emergency support through temporary funding generously provided by a Foundation, but permanent stable funding is needed to continue and expand.

Access to medical care is essential for migrant workers, who often return over multiple years risking greater exposure to injury through the nature of the industries and jobs they are employed in. For migrant workers, the mandatory waiting period to be covered under the BC Medical Services Plan (MSP) creates a precarious period during which they are vulnerable to paying unanticipated, expensive medical costs. Waiving the waiting period and the minimum 6 month residency requirement would: 1) allow migrant workers to seek necessary medical care through walk-in clinics, 2) alleviate the burden on emergency care, and 3) align with the support provided in other provinces and to refugee newcomers in BC.

By creating a permanent emergency fund and improving access to provincial healthcare, BC can demonstrate leadership in supporting migrant workers in at-risk situations and optimize the value they bring to our economy.

Recommendation #2:

Create a permanent emergency support fund for migrant workers in BC and waive the 3-month waiting period for the BC Medical Services Plan for eligible migrant workers. This will provide security and stability for migrant workers allowing them to thrive and contribute their much-needed skills and labour in our province.





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3. Culturally-Safe, Low-Barrier Mental Health Services for Ethno-Cultural Communities and Newcomers

In BC, 28.3% of residents are immigrants, giving BC the second highest proportion of immigrants in Canada. Individuals identifying as a visible minority, now make up almost two thirds of the Greater Vancouver area. The growing diversity points to the importance of addressing the unique mental health needs of these populations in a way that is culturally safe, and ensures access to mental health services without fear.

In our increasingly multicultural society, cultural awareness and safety is an integral component in many health care interactions. Members of immigrant, refugee, ethno-cultural and racialized communities experience social determinants of mental health that are shaped by in-equalities related to housing, education, employment and linguistic barriers. By taking a health equity approach, based on up-to-date cost-benefit analyses, immigrant-serving settlement organizations can develop culturally responsive, safe and accessible mental health services that improve the health outcomes of IRER communities.

Research has shown that improving mental health and social inclusion dramatically improves adaptation to Canadian ways of life, allowing newcomers to thrive. For newcomers seeking mental health support, culturally safe and trauma-informed approaches are vital to allow for connection to appropriate services and adherence to treatment. Providing services in ways that remove barriers, such as not requiring proof of immigration status and in a newcomer's first or preferred language, would have a significant impact on mental health outcomes.

Recommendation #3:

Increase funding for settlement organizations to provide mental health services that are trauma-informed, culturally-safe, language specific, and uniquely respond to the intersecting vulnerabilities of migrant communities. Removing barriers to access without need to prove immigration status is integral to this approach.

