



In the wake of the recent Federal-Provincial-Territorial Health Ministers' meeting, there is increasing concern about the ongoing crisis in provincial health systems across the country; a crisis that is threatening the wellbeing of all Canadians and of healthcare workers alike.

Solutions to the crisis exist.

[WES Canada](#), a non-profit social enterprise dedicated to helping international students, immigrants, and refugees achieve their educational and career goals, alongside many healthcare sector stakeholders, are calling on Canada to start recognizing and leveraging the talents of the thousands of internationally educated health professionals (IEHPs) already here, and those who continue to arrive, to put their skills to work in our healthcare system.

Internationally educated health professionals (IEHPs), including physicians, nurses, and allied health practitioners, are a critical element of our healthcare system and their contributions are key to addressing the province's health care needs. Immigrants account for more than a [quarter](#) of the health care and social assistance workforce in Canada, and yet their skills and experience are extremely underutilized. According to StatCan, in 2020, [nearly half](#) (47%) of immigrants who received their healthcare education abroad are unemployed or underemployed in positions that don't utilize their skills and experience. *The healthcare professionals that Canada needs to address the labour force crisis are already here and ready to work.*

On Nov 4th, the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) and HealthCareCAN provided government with "[a prescription for hope](#)" to stabilize our health system. Among the 7 key steps proposed is the recommendation to **"streamline the immigration and credentialing/licensing processes to help internationally educated health professionals get into the system to fill vacancies."**

WES Canada strongly agrees with and endorses these recommendations.

In fact, integrating the talents of the thousands of internationally educated health professionals must become a priority to rebuilding our healthcare workforce. Streamlining pathways to practice for these health professionals are low cost, practical and essential.

WES Canada works with IEHP organizations and key healthcare stakeholders refining solutions that will bring these underutilized healthcare skills into our system while ensuring high quality care. We have worked with key experts to develop a set of coherent [policy recommendations](#) for the integration of IEHPs in Ontario and nationally, and have produced [research](#) on the limited availability of data on IEHPs in Canada. We have brought together key stakeholders in Ontario's hospital sector, long term care/home care and community health care sectors to design and jointly advocate for initiatives that can put qualified internationally trained nurses into workplaces where their skills and experience are desperately needed. We work with a [broad coalition](#) representing more than 4,500 internationally trained doctors (ITDs) advocating for the implementation of concrete [measures](#) that could bring thousands more doctors into our system and result in a significant return on investment.

Many across the healthcare system have put forward clear recommendations and solutions that can meaningfully address today's healthcare challenges. We urge your office to examine these measures closely, along with the necessary investments, and to work across government and the healthcare ecosystem to move these solutions forward in a systemic and strategic manner.

The time for one off projects and solutions is done. The key to addressing the long-standing and intractable problem of wasting the skills of healthcare workers who come to Canada is to ensure that there is:

- An integrated approach to the creation of an IEHP strategy within a larger health workforce strategy for Canada and for the provinces and territories; and a governance infrastructure that ensures that this strategy is collectively stewarded, coordinated, and evaluated for impact.
- Strong government leadership at all levels and among all relevant ministries - federally, IRCC, Health Canada and ESDC and provincially with counterpart ministries of health, labour, education.
- Strong investment and ongoing support to ensure that the solutions envisioned are effective and sustained.
- On-going government-supported collaboration of stakeholders who have a role immigration, licensure, employment, and retention of IEHPs. This must include government, regulators, professional associations, healthcare education, healthcare employers, settlement sector organizations, and IEHPs themselves.

Internationally educated health care professionals have been and will continue to be a core part of our healthcare workforce, and the time is now to ensure they have a clear, expeditious and supported pathway that enables them to apply their skills. WES remains dedicated to collaborating with governments, IEHPs, and all healthcare stakeholders to move proven solutions to underutilization of IEHP skills forward.

We look forward to an opportunity to meet with your team to explore these solutions further and to provide additional details around their implementation. To arrange a meeting or for more information, please do not hesitate to have your staff contact Mr. Karl Flecker, Associate Director, Policy Advocacy at kflecker@wes.org or 647-373-0951, or Puneet Luthra, Senior Manager, Public Affairs and External Relations at pluthra@wes.org or 437-886-8321.

Sincerely,
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