

Start Your Future Here.

2025 Ontario General Election: Our Memorandum to All Contesting Parties

Established over 30 years ago and operating three campuses in Ontario, Computek College has provided practical diploma and certificate programs in business, healthcare, and technology for thousands of newcomers and internationally trained professionals to become employed in the healthcare, business, and technology sectors. As an organisation built by immigrants who have benefitted from the resources and possibilities offered to us by Canada, we are uniquely positioned to understand and respond to the cultural and economic barriers that can prove to be significant hurdles for newcomers entering the workforce. We have successfully served newcomers, women and people of colour seeking to enter the job market through our four major priorities: offering practical learning from industry-proven instructors with employer insight; supporting economic contribution by easing skilled and motivated workers into the workforce; building innovative partnerships with employers; and working to help transform our local communities. Studies show that newcomers are more than twice as likely to start and own their own businesses in Canada,¹ and we have endeavored to empower newcomers in their pursuit of employment. We have focused on mitigating the cultural and economic barriers that can prove to be significant hurdles for these newcomers, graduating close to 1,500 students every year, and consistently engage both current students and alumni in advocating for the needs of their families and communities. As a trusted training provider immersed in these communities, we have risen to their expressed need for civic education and, since 2022, have actively supported their [civic engagement and broader community mobilisation](#). It is in that capacity that we raise the issues that are the priorities of our extended newcomer communities, consisting of both citizens and citizens in the making.

Immigration

Canada's openness to immigration has historically proven to be a competitive advantage, providing us with a source of economic strength and the diversity that has driven innovation. A 2022 report by Scotia Economics shows that there are currently more than one million vacant jobs in Canada, with 40 per cent of organisations facing near-record high labour shortages, limiting their capacity for growth.² One of the solutions for this crisis is immigration and Canada is expected to welcome 1.45 million immigrants over the next few years, with Statistics Canada projecting that the proportion of immigrants in our population could reach up to 30 per cent by 2036. Despite record-breaking immigration to Canada, employers in healthcare as well as other key sectors are still struggling to find workers. The Government of Canada aims to address this crisis through its increased 2024-26 *Immigration Levels Plan* which projects the admission of nearly 1.5 million immigrants by 2026.³ The Federal government is particularly

1 BDC's Index of New Entrepreneurial Activity, 2018

² <https://www.scotiabank.com/ca/en/about/economics/economics-publications/post.other-publications.insights-views.older-cdns-in-workforce--june-15--2022-.html>

³ <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/notices/supplementary-immigration-levels-2024-2026.html>

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focused on attracting skilled workers who will contribute to Canada's economy even as Canada continues its long-standing commitment to recognising the importance of family reunification and helping the world's most vulnerable populations through refugee resettlement.

As the Government of Canada's Immigration Levels Plan for 2023-2025 reveals, more than 20 per cent of newcomers are expected to be skilled workers and finance professionals. This gives Ontario, as the province that welcomes the largest number of immigrants, a unique opportunity to tap into the rich knowledge, strong experience, and deep networks that global finance professionals can bring to financial hubs across the country. We have the potential to convert newcomers' preimmigration professional prowess into lucrative trading relationships that would make us less dependent on the US for our global trade.⁴ Yet, these and other immigrants can only be effectively leveraged for Ontario's economic growth if they are empowered through an affordable cost of living, accessible healthcare, innovative work-integrated training programs, coaching, mentorship and workplace cultural sensitivity support that would set them up for success.

Affordability

There is a cost-of-living crisis in Canada with around 50% of Canadians living paycheque to paycheque, thanks to the mass layoffs, supply-chain hiccups, and other everyday disruptions of the pandemic, which have culminated in a skyrocketing inflation. A Statistics Canada survey conducted just a few months ago found that 45 per cent of respondents complained of difficulties in meeting their day-to-day expenses. Younger people attempting to start their own families or separate households have been hardest hit, with rental and housing costs skyrocketing to twice what they were three years ago, with the prospect of home ownership increasingly out of reach. In Ontario, which is one of the two provinces with the highest housing costs in the country, the cost of the average home is close to \$200K higher than that of the national average. Further, the average Ontarian family, whose pay has not kept pace with rising inflation, has seen their purchasing power diminish, as the food component of the Consumer Price Index increased by 24 per cent, leaving them facing an almost 40% increase in grocery bills. Economic growth slowed to a crawl in 2023 and has continued to lag in 2024 resulting in labour market challenges as job growth slows and the unemployment rate rises. We recognize that the future is not so bleak, as the Bank of Canada aims to bring inflation back to its official 2 per cent target, lowering its short-term policy interest rate, from 5 per cent in May 2024 to 4.5 per cent today. As we see inflation rates stabilising and interest rates starting to reduce, we can anticipate consumer-relief, yet rising unemployment has offset some of these positives and financial stability remains out of reach. The 3.5% wage increase expected for many Ontario workers will provide a measure of relief but not enough to offset the total cost of living increase of 2.5-2.7%, especially for those who work in sectors that experience lower wage growth. This increasingly includes the middle class in Ontario.

Healthcare

⁴ https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/canadas-secret-weapon-to-combat-trump-is-hiding-in-plain-sight/article_03bb77ca-d81c-11ef-969d-3b2c5e2b884d.html#tncms-source=login

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We are in the midst of a national healthcare crisis, when 6.5 million Canadians do not have a regular care provider. In Ontario, especially in rural and suburban areas, the number of family doctors has dwindled over the past few decades. We welcome the collaboration of federal, provincial, and territorial governments on solutions such as team-based care models that have been implemented in the Scarborough Health Network, for instance, and the incentives for doctors and personal support workers and caregivers to work in rural areas. We have trained vital healthcare staff who are an integral part of these solutions, whether in team-based care models, or serving in suburbs and rural areas. We would also advocate for improved physician mobility, allowing doctors to practise in multiple jurisdictions when needed, and for tracking progress on health and better accountability measures to ensure transparency and improved healthcare in the province and across the country. Internally, we hope to scale ComputeK's technical and vocational educational experience and training expertise to international markets to recruit, train, and facilitate the direct hiring of trainees by Canadian employers through the EMPP or related programs to further address shortages in the healthcare sector. We could train and/or upskill potential healthcare workers in Canada's targeted source countries, ensuring that they enter the Canadian job market ready for employment with our employment partners. Drawing from trusted networks in these source countries and our own sensitivities and expertise in navigating a range of communities through our diverse teams, the project promises predictable and safer recruitment of a competitive workforce.

Skills Training and Job Creation

Skilled workers have several immigration pathways available to them. However, these economic migration selection systems face a number of challenges including verification of credentials and real skills of immigrants; the reluctance of many employers to use the Job Bank; imbalances in the dispersal of immigrants, with many staying in the cities in which they train even when they are unable to find work in their chosen field; the complexity of the system that makes it hard to navigate from outside of Canada and in some cases the lack of soft skills and cultural competency training to mobilize their technical training in the North American workplace. While these challenges may seem daunting enough, the presence of illegal and unregistered operators who exploit vulnerable foreign students and temporary foreign workers have had negative social and socioeconomic ripple effects in Canada that will take years to repair. The abuses and frauds perpetrated in these programs has led the Federal government to reign in the number of foreign students entering the country, as well the Temporary Foreign Workers Program as a whole. These measures may mitigate some of the abuses of the system but cannot tackle the long-term issue of labour shortages in Canada, especially in skilled professions.

In the face of rising unemployment, we must recognise that labour market-relevant training is vital to ensuring Canada's workforce has the skills needed, as the workforce ages and technology changes. A research report ComputeK College commissioned identified several employment barriers for newcomers seeking employment, which included: challenges accessing employment, difficulty finding information about job opportunities, lack of Canadian work experience, absence of credential recognition in Canada for their pre-existing qualifications, and limited networks through which to access jobs. Employers also described



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difficulties in attracting candidates with both Canadian experience and the appropriate qualifications. Skills training, and by this we mean a combination of hard and soft skills combined with market-focused wraparound services, has demonstrably increased the employability of these newcomers. Yet, over the last 30 years, Canada has seen a decline in the percentage of its public spending on training, dropping from a high of 0.35% in 1991 to 0.06% in 2018.⁵ This does not bode well for the employment targets the province must meet to ensure its long-term economic stability.

As one-time newcomers immersed in diverse communities, we possess an intimate knowledge of the challenges and opportunities facing newcomers in Ontario, as we have confronted them and risen to those challenges ourselves. Yet, today, many newcomers who arrived here, like us, pursuing the Canadian Dream in Ontario, find themselves facing challenges that compel them to migrate elsewhere. We believe that with the right solutions in place, Canada can continue to leverage the most promising and competitive newcomers who will contribute to stabilizing our labour force and our economy, leading to prosperity for all.

⁵ OECD, 2020.