

PROVINCIAL IMMIGRATION POLICY

Filling the gap: immigration and Alberta's economic future



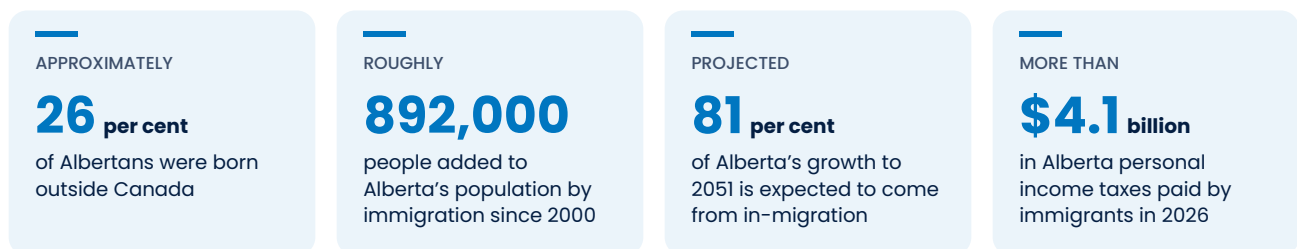
**Calgary
Chamber**

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Filling the gap: immigration and Alberta's economic future

Immigrants have helped to build Alberta, contributing to its growth and prosperity, making it one of Canada's strongest-growing economies. This growth depends on businesses having access to the workers and skills they need to invest, expand and compete globally. As the province's economy grows and evolves, so too does the demand for labour, with workforce needs varying across sectors, occupations and skill levels. Today's economic growth will depend on building a workforce that has the right skills at the right time that can keep pace with the needs of Alberta businesses. As Alberta's economy evolves and demand for skilled workers grows, maintaining access to immigrant talent alongside investments in developing Alberta's domestic workforce will be critical to sustaining the province's long-term competitiveness and economic prosperity.

KEY FIGURES



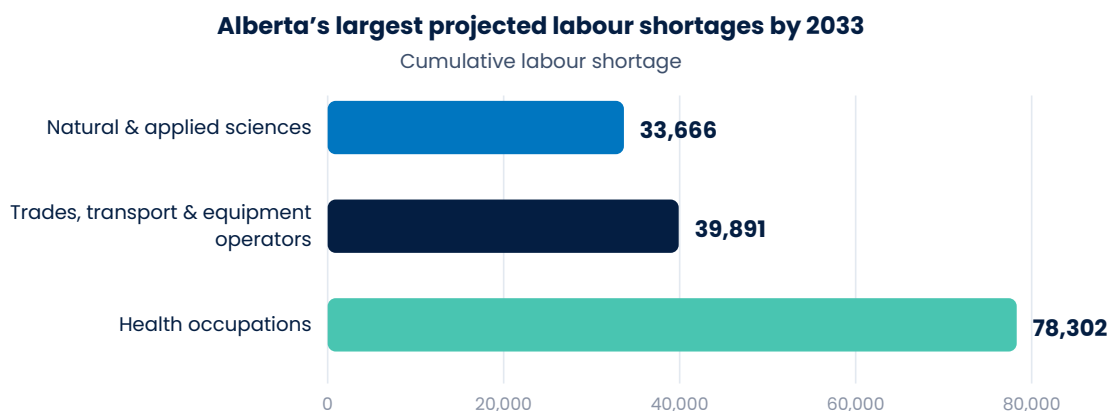
Immigration is critical to Alberta's workforce

Alberta's labour market data presents an apparent contradiction. Alberta job vacancies remain elevated, while employers continue to report difficulty finding workers with the skills they need. In the Government of Alberta's 2025–2030 [Alberta Jobs Strategy](#) approximately 65 per cent of Alberta businesses were experiencing increasing difficulty accessing the talent they require, particularly for higher-skilled roles. Workers who are unemployed in one sector may not have the skills, credentials or experience required to immediately fill vacancies in another. Re-skilling and workforce participation are essential to address this gap, but these efforts take time. Immigration can provide a bridge by helping businesses fill existing vacancies while workers retrain and develop the skills needed for available jobs.

Calgary businesses are already relying on immigrant workers to operate effectively. In a recent Calgary Chamber member survey, 51 per cent of respondents said immigrant employees are important to their organization's ability to operate effectively. Reliance is particularly high among larger businesses – 71 per cent of organizations with 50 or more employees said immigrant employees are important to their operations.

Immigration has already been a major source of Alberta's population and workforce growth. Research prepared for the Calgary Chamber by economist Trevor Tombe reveals that approximately [26 per cent](#) of Albertans were born outside Canada. Since 2000, immigration has added roughly [892,000](#) people to Alberta's population, while net flows of non-permanent residents added another [231,000](#). By comparison, natural population growth added approximately [651,000](#) people over the same period.

This contribution will become even more important over time. Reskilling alone will not address Alberta's longer-term labour force needs. The province will also need to expand its labour force as the population ages and economy grows. An aging population will increase demand for workers in sectors such as health care and social assistance, and Alberta's [long term job market forecast](#) indicates that by 2033 these will be the most serious and persistent labour shortages of any sector in the province.



When businesses cannot access the workers and skills they need, projects are delayed, expansion plans postponed and operating capacity constrained. Some businesses may choose to relocate. Persistent workforce gaps can also limit productivity and Alberta's ability to capitalize on opportunities in growing sectors. Alberta is projected to add roughly [1.9 million residents](#) between 2025 and 2051, with 81 per cent of that growth expected to come from in-migration – 62 per cent from out of country and 19 per cent from out of province. This means immigration will not simply supplement Alberta's future workforce; it will be one of the primary sources of the population and labour-force growth needed to support the province's expanding economy.

Recent changes to temporary foreign worker policy illustrate how changes to immigration programs can quickly alter employers' access to international labour. Between April and September 2024 and during the same period in 2025, Alberta's low-wage Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) intake fell from 7,071 to 1,509, a [79 per cent](#) decline. Intake across all LMIA streams fell by 72 per cent over the same period. While LMIA applications are not a direct measure of the number of temporary foreign workers employed, the scale of the decline demonstrates how quickly policy changes can affect a key pathway employers use to address workforce needs.

Alberta's recent experience shows that population growth and employment growth can occur together. In 2023–24, Alberta welcomed over [145,000 international migrants](#) while employment increased by approximately 85,600 jobs, or 3.6 per cent. While rapid growth contributed to an expanding labour force, it was also accompanied by significant employment growth.

The relationship between immigration and unemployment is more complex than the number of people entering the province. In 2025, employment increased a further [2.8 per cent](#) even as migration into Alberta slowed and the unemployment rate rose to 7.2 per cent. These trends demonstrate that Alberta's unemployment rate is influenced by broader labour-market conditions, including the pace of labour-force growth relative to job creation and the type of jobs, rather than an influx of immigration alone.

Immigration complements domestic workforce development

Immigration is not a substitute for developing Alberta's domestic workforce, but it is an important addition. Businesses play a significant role in developing domestic talent, investing in apprenticeships, training and upskilling. Additionally, partnerships with post-secondary institutions help to build the local talent pipeline. In 2024–25 alone, more than [13,000 employers](#) participated in apprenticeship programs delivered through post-secondary institutions throughout the province.

These investments are essential to strengthening Alberta's workforce, but domestic workforce development alone will not be sufficient to meet current and future labour demand. An aging population sustained economic growth and changing skill requirements will continue to create workforce pressures. As Alberta is set to embark on a significant growth trajectory – owing to the changing nature of global energy systems and the need to increase energy production – the need for a large skilled workforce is even greater. Immigration can help address these gaps by expanding the available talent pool and providing access to specialized skills, technical expertise and professional credentials.

Maintaining appropriate immigration pathways alongside continued investment in education, training and workforce participation will help ensure Alberta businesses have access to the workers and skills they need to grow and compete.

Recognizing credentials supports economic productivity

Newcomers must also be able to put their education, skills and experience to work. While Alberta has made strides in reducing barriers, continued improvements remain important. In a 2025 study published by ActionDignity, only [29 per cent](#) of a recent newcomers surveyed reported full recognition of their foreign credentials, and more than 65 per cent reported working below their qualification level, despite over half holding a bachelor's degree or higher.

Skilled newcomers often arrive with education and professional experience that are in demand, yet delays in recognizing credentials, or the lack of recognition for some foreign credentials, can prevent them from working in their field. Improving recognition processes would allow employers to access qualified workers sooner while enabling newcomers to contribute more fully to the economy.

Ease of interprovincial mobility must also be considered. When professionals face different credential recognition requirements across provinces, workers who have already completed the recognition process may encounter additional barriers when moving within Canada. Access to Red Seal Certification is one of the most important tools for trades people in Canada as it allows workers to move from province to province without having to retest. Reducing unnecessary duplication would improve labour mobility and make better use of skills already available in the Canadian workforce.

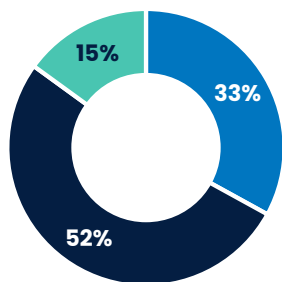
Alberta must remain competitive for global and Canadian talent

Alberta competes with other provinces and countries for skilled workers, entrepreneurs and investment. Alberta's advantages, including low taxes, a high quality of life and a diverse economy help attract talent. But workers also consider access to public services and their ability to establish successful lives for themselves and their families.

Access to health care, education and other public services can factor into decisions about where workers and their families chose to live. Policies that increase the cost or difficulty of establishing a life in Alberta could make it more difficult for employers to attract and retain the talent they need.

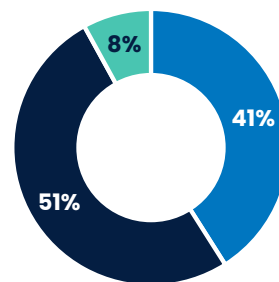
Calgary Chamber polling indicates most businesses are not in favour of sweeping changes to our provincial immigration policies. Only one-third of members support Alberta having more control over immigration, compared to 52 per cent opposed, and less than half are in favour of restricting newcomers' access to provincial services. These findings suggest that employers see the value of maintaining an immigration system that supports Alberta's ability to attract and retain workers.

Calgary Chamber members' views on increased provincial control over immigration



■ Support ■ Don't support ■ Unsure

Support for Alberta limiting eligibility for provincially funded programs

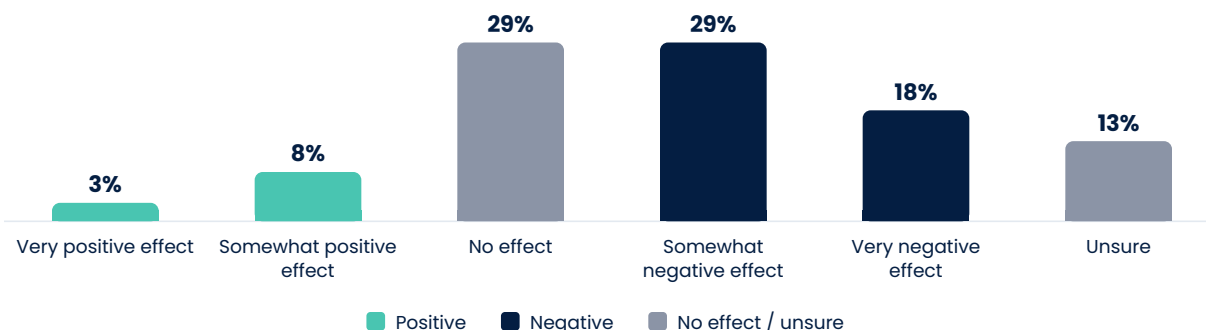


■ Support ■ Don't support ■ Unsure

Attracting workers from elsewhere also helps strengthen Alberta's demographic position. Roughly [80 per cent](#) of people moving to Alberta from another province are under 40. Younger workers expand the labour force and tax base while, on average, making relatively lighter use of health care, the province's largest program expense.

Skilled workers have many choices on where they live and work, and jurisdictions across Canada and internationally are competing for a limited pool of talent. Maintaining Alberta's reputation as an attractive place to live and work will therefore be increasingly important to meeting future workforce needs and access to workers is a key concern for Calgary businesses. More than 45 per cent of Calgary Chamber members say recent or proposed changes to immigration policies would negatively affect their business, compared with 11 per cent who believe they would have a positive impact.

If a majority of Albertans vote "Yes" to the immigration referendum questions, what kind of effect will this have on your organization?



Immigrants contribute beyond the labour market

The economic contribution of immigration extends beyond filling workforce gaps. Immigrant entrepreneurs and business owners contribute to Alberta's economy through business creation, investment and employment. Immigrants account for [32 per cent](#) of all business owners with paid staff in Canada, demonstrating their significant role in entrepreneurship and job creation.

Immigrants can also strengthen international trade relationships through global business networks, language skills and international market knowledge. These connections can help Alberta businesses reach new customers, attract investment and compete in global markets.

Immigrants also make a significant contribution to Alberta's public finances. Tombe estimates that immigrants paid more than [\\$4.1 billion](#) in Alberta personal income taxes in 2026. Immigrants under 40 alone contributed approximately [\\$1.1 billion](#), and after accounting for provincial family programs, workers' compensation and social assistance, their net fiscal contribution remained just under [\\$1 billion](#).

Conclusion

Alberta's long-term economic success depends on a workforce strategy that combines domestic talent development with the ability to attract skilled workers from across Canada and internationally. Immigration is an important part of meeting current and future labour market needs.

Alberta should maintain responsive immigration pathways aligned with labour market needs while continuing to invest in education, training, workforce participation and credential recognition. This balanced approach will help businesses access the talent they need to invest, grow and compete while strengthening Alberta's broader economic competitiveness.

¹ Estimate includes federal and Alberta personal income tax, employee Canada Pension Plan contributions and Employment Insurance premiums. It excludes employer payroll contributions, GST and other consumption taxes. The \$42,000 earnings assumption is anchored to Statistics Canada's finding that 78 per cent of workers admitted through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program earned less than \$42,000 in 2021. Actual contributions vary according to income, duration of employment, tax residency, deductions, credits and individual circumstances.

About the Calgary Chamber of Commerce

The Calgary Chamber exists to empower our business community to advance a prosperous Calgary and Canada. As the convenor and catalyst for a vibrant, inclusive and prosperous business community, the Chamber works to build strength and resilience among its members and position Calgary as a magnet for talent, diversification and opportunity. As an independent, non-profit, non-partisan organization founded in 1891, we build on our history to serve and advocate for businesses of all sizes, in all sectors across the city.



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