AMSSA'S RESPONSE TO BUDGET 2025 AND IMMIGRATION LEVELS PLAN 2026 – 2028

INTRODUCTION

Immigration has always been central to Canada's success and remains vital to British Columbia's future. As the province faces demographic change, an aging population, and persistent labour shortages, newcomers continue to sustain our workforce, fuel innovation, and strengthen our communities.

The release of *Budget 2025* and the *2026–2028 Immigration Levels Plan* comes at a pivotal moment, following both a new federal leadership mandate and recent reductions to immigration levels and settlement supports. This moment calls for more than stabilization; it calls for leadership. Canada needs a unified, long-term vision for immigration that connects economic growth with inclusion, equity, and belonging, ensuring that every newcomer and every community has the opportunity to thrive.

The following reflects our assessment of the key elements that will shape the settlement and integration sector moving forward.

PROTECTING SETTLEMENT SUPPORTS IN A TIME OF RESTRAINT

While *Budget 2025* meets its promise of fiscal restraint—with cuts to departmental budgets and public service positions—it also commits to maintaining core social programs. We assert that settlement services are essential social infrastructure and that immigrants are essential to Canada's continued growth and prosperity.

According to *WorkBC's 2025 Labour Market Outlook*, BC will see over 1 million job openings in the next decade, many due to retirement as BC's population continues to age. A third of these jobs are expected to be filled by newcomers, especially as the province's natural growth rate cannot sustain its economy alone. The Financial Accountability Office of Ontario's (FAO) Labour Market Outcomes Report reveals that immigration has accounted for 63% of Ontario's labour force since the mid-2010s.

While Canada's economic reliance on newcomers is well documented, what is less certain is newcomers continuing to choose Canada as their new home. The 2024 Leaky Bucket Report examines onward migration figures for Canada and cites that "one in every five immigrants who land in Canada will decide to leave within 25 years." Among international students, early 2025 saw a 30% decrease in new study permit applications as compared to 2024, and a 70% decrease as compared to 2023 falling below the government's targets.

In order for immigrants to continue choosing Canada, they must be made to feel welcome and have the access to the necessary settlement supports (i.e. language training, employment navigation, housing, education, and community connections)
that advance their employability and long-term stability. Reducing settlement funding risks undermining the very foundation that enables newcomers to build their lives here. Moreover,

linking settlement funding solely to annual immigration targets overlooks the reality that newcomers often need multi-year support.

ADVANCING FOREIGN CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION

The introduction of a *Foreign Credential Recognition Action Fund*—a $97 million, five-year initiative—is a welcome step toward addressing long-standing barriers. By focusing on fairness, transparency, and timeliness, especially in health and construction, this initiative responds to need.

However, meaningful progress will depend on ensuring that the most in-demand professions, such as registered nurses, care aides, and general practitioners, are included in reform efforts. Too many skilled newcomers are currently underemployed despite their qualifications. Real change will be measured not by new mechanisms, but by how effectively they translate credentials into careers.

NEED FOR COORDINATED PLANNING

British Columbia's projected one million job openings over the next decade, nearly 60% of which are driven by retirements, underscore the need for a coordinated response. Immigration will supply roughly one-third of the future workforce, but recruitment alone is not enough. Persistent labour shortages in health care, construction, early learning, social services, and emerging technology sectors call for deliberate, coordinated planning.

Immigration policy cannot operate separately from housing availability, health system capacity, training pathways, or community settlement supports. Federal and provincial governments must jointly align workforce, housing, education, and settlement strategies to ensure newcomers can arrive, establish themselves, and stay long term. This alignment is especially critical in rural and northern communities, where labour needs are high and infrastructure and support systems are limited. Flexible, place-based investment will be key to ensuring these communities grow sustainably and thrive.

PATHWAYS TO PERMANENCE AND REAFFIRMING CANADA'S HUMANITARIAN COMMITMENTS

We commend the government's commitment to provide expedited permanent residency for 115,500 protected persons and 33,000 temporary workers not only because it recognizes the vital role that newcomers play in sustaining local economies, but because it recenters Canada's humanitarian values. Limited pathways to permanent residency are a stressor for many newcomers, acting as a barrier to their settlement journey. Introducing these pathways goes a long way towards easing that burden.

There still remain, however, areas of concern. First, we urge caution against framing access to permanency as conditional on proving economic worth. In the current climate of rising anti-immigration sentiment, temporary workers continue to face stereotypes that question their economic contribution and portray them as a 'burden' on social systems, narratives that do not align with reality. Positioning this pathway to permanency as available only to those who meet certain requirements marking them as a 'good, tax-contributing' member of Canadian society, implies, however unintentionally, that there are other temporary workers who are not, and are therefore less deserving of belonging.

Second, this year's level's plan continues a pattern of disproportionately reducing the targets for the 'Refugees and Protected Persons' and 'Humanitarian and Compassionate and Others' categories. Reductions in humanitarian immigration targets overall are down nearly 30% since 2023, running counter to Canada's legacy of leadership in humanitarian response. Canada's immigration system must continue to balance economic imperatives with humanitarian principles and global responsibility.

LOOKING AHEAD: A CALL FOR VISION AND LEADERSHIP

While efforts to stabilize immigration may be fiscally prudent, the current approach risks constraining population growth and deepening existing labour shortages. Immigration must remain a cornerstone of Canada's demographic and economic vitality, not a fluctuating variable.

Labour gaps in health care, construction, early learning, social services, and emerging technology industries demand a sustained and coordinated response. To succeed, federal and provincial governments must work together to align immigration, housing, health care, education, and settlement planning. Rural and northern communities, in particular, require flexible, targeted supports that reflect their unique realities. Smaller communities often serve vast geographic areas with limited transportation, housing, and digital infrastructure, and have smaller labour pools that rely heavily on the attraction and retention of newcomers to sustain local economies, fill essential jobs, and maintain vital community services.

CONCLUSION

Immigration is not merely a response to economic need; it is a national investment in prosperity, inclusion, and identity. No part of this budget is possible without the skills, talents, innovation, and investment of immigrants. Equally, we cannot forget Canada's legacy as a global leader in immigration and humanitarian support.

Now is the moment for all levels of government, along with partners across sectors, to come together around a shared, evidence-based vision: one that connects immigration with housing, health care, education, and community integration.

As part of the Canada We Believe In coalition, AMSSA upholds that immigration is not merely a policy lever but a shared national value—one that defines who we are and who we aspire to be. By building a coordinated, forward-looking system rooted in inclusion, opportunity, and partnership, we can ensure that every newcomer and every community has the opportunity to thrive.