



New Canada-Alberta agreement focuses on underutilized sources of talent

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As part of a new Canada-Alberta labour agreement signed in September, the federal government will provide \$52.2 million annually to the province to help Aboriginal people, immigrants, persons with disabilities and women improve their skills.

"The business community is pleased with the provincial and federal governments' continued emphasis on solutions to the labour shortage, the most important issue of our membership," said Geoff Pradella, Vice-President of Public & Government Affairs for the Calgary Chamber of Commerce. "Through meetings with Ministers and ongoing advocacy efforts we've worked to keep this issue forefront with elected officials."

More than half of the money will be used to expand training opportunities and enhance career information and counseling services. The remainder will be used for immigration programs and partnerships with industry to improve the literacy and essential skills of low-skilled workers.

"Today's announcement will help thousands enjoy the benefits of Alberta's prosperous economy and respond to Alberta's skill and labour shortages," said Diane Ablonczy, Secretary of State, during a Sep. 2 news release.

The Chamber has long advocated a multi-pronged approach to labour force development including more effective use of underutilized sources of talent such as older workers, Aboriginal Canadians, youth, women, and people with disabilities. It has offered recommendations to government to improve immigration processes and better facilitate and support temporary foreign workers.

In 2002, it established the Talent Pool Development Society of Calgary to bridge the gap between employers having difficulty finding skilled workers and the many workers in Calgary who were either under-employed or unemployed. Key initiatives include employer education workshops; the Career Show, which links students with employers and post-secondary opportunities; and research that identifies barriers and recommendations to fully engage new immigrants.

This fall, in partnership with the Talent Pool Development Society, the Chamber will undertake research to improve the labour market outcomes of Aboriginal people and entrepreneurs both within, and transitioning to, the Calgary region.

Alberta Employment and Immigration forecasts a shortfall of 111,000 workers by 2017.