
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Economic Development
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SUCCESSFUL IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM EXPANDS

VANCOUVER – The Skills Connect for Immigrants Program, which helps skilled immigrants find jobs that match their skills and experience, is expanding to include occupations in the health sector, announced Economic Development Minister Colin Hansen at a celebratory event today at the Coquitlam Campus of Douglas College.

“Attracting workers to our province who are trained in occupations experiencing shortages is critical to our economy,” said Hansen. “To help spread the word that B.C. is a welcoming destination, we must make it easier and faster for immigrants to integrate into life here, and that includes finding work in their chosen career.”

Since Skills Connect services began in July 2006, more than 1,300 immigrants have benefited from the program, and approximately 900 new immigrants are expected to enrol between October 2007 and March 2008. The program helps immigrants navigate an unfamiliar labour market, overcome language barriers, gain experience in the Canadian workplace and upgrade their skills, if necessary. To mark the program’s accomplishments, Hansen was joined by several Skills Connect clients who have found suitable employment, as well as representatives of the organizations who deliver the program.

“We’re excited about the opportunities that the Skills Connect program provides B.C. employers and skilled immigrants,” said Brent Mulhall, director of Back in Motion, one of the Skills Connect service providers. “This is a very progressive program we feel will produce positive results for both B.C.’s economy as well as those who move to Canada in search of a better life.”

The Skills Connect for Immigrants Program is a key component of Work BC, the provincial action plan to address skills shortages. The program connects skilled immigrants with employment in communities throughout B.C. in sectors where skills shortages exist or are projected – specifically, construction, transportation, energy, and tourism and hospitality. Extensive consultations were carried out over the past months with health sector stakeholders to identify ways that the Skills Connect program could help address skills shortages in their sector.

“Internationally educated health professionals have much to offer British Columbia,” said Health Minister George Abbott. “Making it easier and faster for qualified immigrants to work in British Columbia will make the province a destination of choice and bolster our workforce.”

Services for the health sector will focus on clients in the 12 health occupations experiencing skill shortages, including registered and licensed practical nurses, laboratory technologists, pharmacists, occupational therapists, physicians, physiotherapists. The target is to help 200 clients through the program by March 31, 2008, and 400 in fiscal year 2008/09.

“A major part of our program is working one-to-one with people to assist them to complete any upgrading and re-certification they need as quickly and easily as possible,” said Douglas College program co-ordinator Lois Taylor. “The key to success is developing an individualized plan for every client.”

Skills Connect services are delivered through the following agencies: Camosun College, DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society, Douglas College, Association of Service Providers for Employability and Career Training, Multicultural Helping House Society and Back in Motion. Douglas College and Back in Motion were selected through a competitive procurement process to also deliver Skills Connect services for the health sector.

This fiscal’s total budget for Skills Connect is \$9.9 million for all employment sectors, including health. The provincial budget allocation is \$4.8 million and Citizen and Immigration Canada will contribute \$4.1 million. The Ministry of Health, with funding from Health Canada’s Internationally Educated Health Professions Initiative, will contribute \$1.0 million in 07/08 towards the cost to expand Skills Connect to the health sector.

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