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Urgent Need to Include Developmental Service Workers (DSWs) in Federal Post-Graduate Work Permit Eligibility

COMMUNITY LIVING   **oasis**
Ontario

A. The Issue in Brief

The federal government's recent changes to post-graduate work permit eligibility exclude Developmental Service Worker (DSW) graduates from public colleges, undermining Ontario's ability to address critical workforce shortages. This decision has already led to the cancellation of programme intakes at many Ontario colleges, threatening the training pipeline for DSWs who play a vital role in the province's developmental services system.

In short, the failure to include DSWs as eligible for post graduate work permits is putting the safety and security of some of Ontario's most vulnerable residents at risk.

Community Living Ontario and OASIS are urging the federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to include DSWs under eligible CIP categories for post-graduate work permits.

B. Background

On 15 November 2024, federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Marc Miller [announced significant reductions in the eligibility of international students for post-graduate work permits](#). While international graduates from bachelor's, master's, and post-doctoral programmes remain eligible for up to three-year work permits, graduates from public colleges now face [significant restrictions](#).

The exclusion of DSW programmes (CIP code: 19.0710) from eligible categories is especially concerning given Ontario's acute workforce challenges. For years now, the developmental services (DS) sector has been confronting a **significant skills and labour shortage**. The health care and social assistance sector, which includes developmental services, has the largest job vacancy rate in the province of Ontario, averaging **53,000 unfilled positions in the first three quarters of 2023**.

C. Key Issues/Challenges

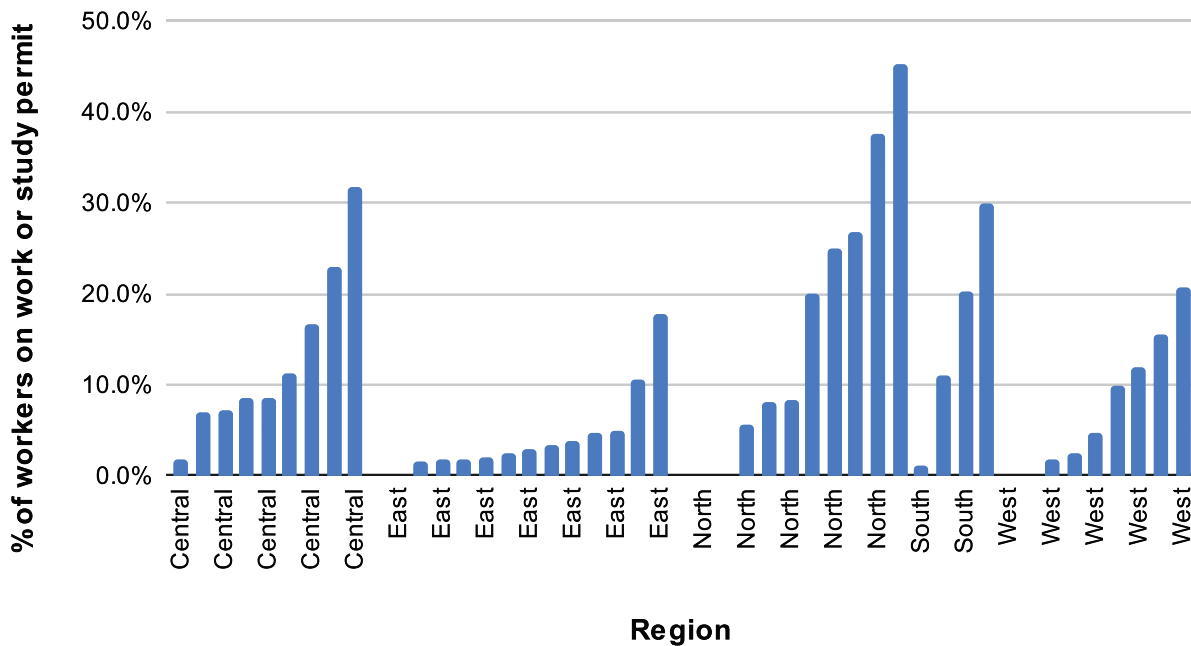
1. Cancellation of DSW Programme Intakes:

- Following the federal changes, **12 of Ontario's 13 DSW programmes have cancelled or reduced their January 2025 intakes**, and all summer intakes have been cancelled. Colleges are reassessing whether domestic-only intakes in Fall 2025 are feasible.

2. Dependence on International Students:

- International students make up a significant proportion of DSW trainees in Ontario. For instance, at Fanshawe College in London (the largest DSW program in the province), **73% of the current 273 DSW students are international**. Without these students, programmes will either shrink drastically or cease to operate.
- **Developmental service agencies depend on international workers to fill critical roles.** A recent survey of 50 organizations in the sector (employing nearly 10,000 people) found that employees on work or study permit account for 11% of all direct service staff. While dependence on this HR resource varies across organizations, 85% of agencies employ at least one international employee; on average, each of these agencies employs more than twenty international workers. The chart below shows that the grand majority of developmental service organizations will be negatively affected by the recent changes; those in the north will be most adversely affected. (Note that each line in the chart represents one developmental service agency.)

Percentage of workers on work or study permit, by organization and region



3. Critical Workforce Implications:

- Agencies that rely on DSWs are facing immediate and ongoing workforce shortages. According to recent sector research:
 - 55% of DS agencies report a lack of qualified candidates.

- 58% report that there are not enough students graduating from related programs.
 - 30% of DS agencies report being unable to fill job vacancies because they are unable to find qualified staff.
- Data from Ontario’s Ministry of Colleges and Universities shows that 96% of DSW program graduates find employment within six months of graduation, and 94% find employment in developmental services. This reflects the desperate need for workers, as well as the financial and social contributions these workers make in their communities.

4. Misalignment with Workforce Needs:

- Despite intensified efforts by Ontario colleges, domestic enrolment in DSW programmes is insufficient to replace international students. For example, Fanshawe College hosted **76 domestic students studying to be DSWs in Winter 2024, compared to 197 International students**. The spaces left vacant in the absence of international students will not be taken by domestic students. Colleges are currently assessing the feasibility of running DS programs with only domestic students.

D. Recommendations

1. Amend the Policy:

- Include Developmental Service Workers (CIP code: 19.0710) under the list of eligible post-graduate work permit programmes and recognise the essential role of DSWs in the developmental services sector and the people and families they support. **We would note that Nolan Quinn, Ontario’s Minister of Colleges and Universities, has made this same recommendation.**

2. Engage Stakeholders:

- Establish a federal-provincial working group with input from colleges, developmental service agencies, and DS sector representatives to ensure immigration policies support critical workforce pipelines.

E. Benefits of Implementation

1. **Sustaining the DSW Pipeline:** Including DSWs in the post-graduate work permit programme will help restore enrolment in these essential college programs, ensuring a steady supply of qualified workers.

2. **Addressing Workforce Shortages:** DSW graduates fill critical gaps in developmental services across Ontario, supporting people with disabilities to live safely and with dignity.
3. **Policy Consistency:** With 94% of DSW graduates finding work in their field of study, this amendment aligns with the [stated goal](#) of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to work to alleviate pressures on social services.

F. Call to Action

The failure to include DSWs as eligible for post graduate work permits is putting the safety and security of some of Ontario's most vulnerable residents at risk. Community Living Ontario and OASIS are calling on the federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to urgently include Developmental Service Workers (CIP code: 19.0710) in the list of eligible programs for post-graduate work permits. This change is essential to address Ontario's workforce shortages and ensure quality support for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.

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Community Living Ontario is a non-profit provincial association that has been advocating for people who have an intellectual disability and their families for 70+ years. We proudly work alongside 124 local agencies and advocate on behalf of more than 100,000 people across Ontario.

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Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs (OASIS) is a provincial association representing nearly 200 developmental services member agencies across Ontario, which collectively deliver over 85% of developmental services in the province. OASIS members support 65,000 children and adults with developmental disabilities, employing approximately 25,000 dedicated staff members.