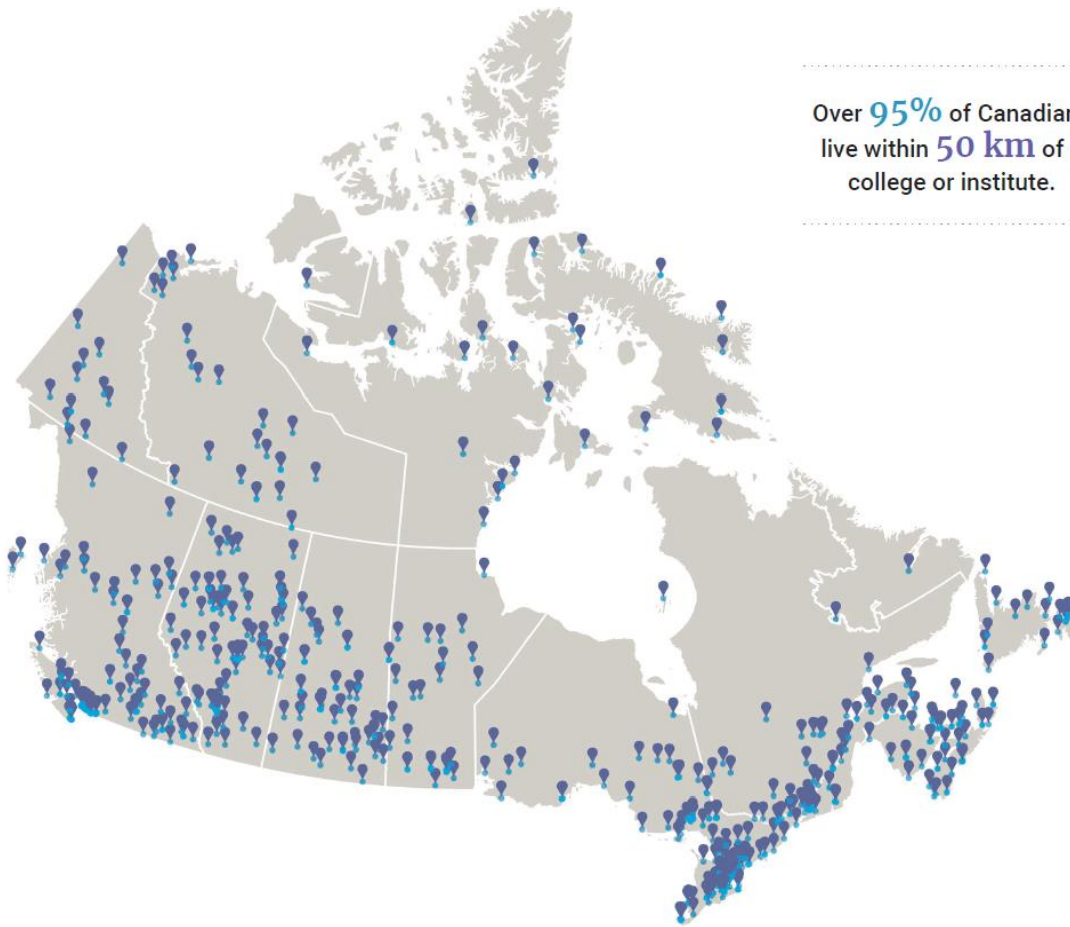


Canada's Colleges: Preparing Workers for the Care Economy



House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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Executive Summary

As Canada recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, a long-anticipated crisis has emerged, adding another challenge to an already complex situation: labour and skills shortages. The demographic shift due to an aging population with declining birthrates, coupled with an economy seeing unprecedented changes driven by technological advancement has transformed how we work and has led to a shortage of workers with the right skills. Few sectors have seen as acute labour shortages as those that comprise the care economy, which includes healthcare workers, personal support workers, and childcare workers.

To meet this challenge, colleges¹ are changing and adapting to better equip learners with the skills they need in the way they need them. Learners expect to be future-proofed, and colleges anticipate the needs of our economy, then train, upskill and reskill thinkers and doers. And they do it faster and in innovative new ways.

Throughout the pandemic, colleges were quick to pivot to online learning, support community health efforts, and partner with small- and medium-sized enterprises to support their research and commercialization needs. Colleges continue to lead the way in providing competency-based education that prepares students for the jobs of today and tomorrow. Colleges have also been pioneers of educational change, responding to the demand for fast, accessible programming with a growing number of short courses that allow learners to quickly acquire competencies and in-demand skills, including through microcredentials, continuing education and contract training. These offerings help people rapidly upgrade their skills, provide access to talent development for Indigenous people and facilitate the integration of newcomers in the labour market.

With Canada facing unprecedented labour and skills shortages, Canada's colleges are crucial partners in ensuring that our care economy is strong, resilient and innovative. To achieve this CICan makes the following recommendations:

1. Enable Canadians to quickly upskill or reskill to fill roles in the care economy by providing federal support for the development of flexible and accessible training options and innovative learning pathways, such as microcredentials, that build a stronger, higher quality and more resilient care economy workforce.
2. Increase access to work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities and clinical placements, including investing in innovative approaches to WIL, to ensure those in the care economy are properly equipped with the skills and competencies to succeed.
3. Ensure healthcare workers and others in the care economy have access to training spaces to enter and advance in their careers through infrastructure investments that increase laboratory and classroom spaces at public colleges.
4. Support Canada's labour market with a renewed focus on labour market information to ensure training needs are responding to labour and skills needs of the care economy.
5. Boost Canada's talent pool through the development and implementation of permanent residency streams for international students graduating from colleges and equip colleges to improve labour market outcomes of international students and permanent residents by providing additional support throughout their transition to Canada.

¹ References to "colleges" refer collectively to publicly-assisted colleges, institutes, cegeps and polytechnics.

1. About CICan

Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICan) is the voice of 143 of Canada's publicly-supported colleges, institutes, cegeps and polytechnics, and an international leader in education for employment with ongoing programs in over 25 countries. Across Canada, our members collaborate with governments, industries and not-for-profits to train millions of diverse learners. CICan's members add over \$190 billion to Canada's economy each year and contribute to inclusive economic growth by working with industry and community partners to offer more than 10,000 programs to learners in urban, rural, remote, and northern communities.

2. Introduction and Context

On the heels of the Covid-19 pandemic, as Canada readies for recovery, a long-anticipated crisis has emerged, adding another challenge to an already complex situation: labour and skills shortages. The demographic shift due to an aging population with declining birthrates, coupled with an economy facing an unprecedented surge in technological advances that has transformed how we work has led to a shortage of workers with the right skills. This is having a cascading effect with shortages in skills and labour reaching industries from banking to trades to healthcare.²

The pandemic has exacerbated anticipated labour market shortages in many industries including occupations particularly under scrutiny in this study: healthcare and childcare workers who have been on the frontlines of COVID-19.

Estimates put job vacancies in Canada in record-highs, ranging from 870,000 – to 915,500.³ Forty years ago, there were seven workers to each retiree; currently that number is three, by 2036 it is estimated there will be two workers to each retiree. With 23% of the working population expected to be 65 or older by 2024, the country faces the prospect of greater labour shortages with an estimated 600,000 workers expected to be lost in that time as they retire.⁴ Vacancies in health care also hit a record high during the pandemic.⁵ With close to 215,000 students enrolled in health care related programs in 2019/20, post-secondary education will play a crucial role in filling these vacancies and those to come.⁶ Other areas of the “care economy,” in particular childcare, are also facing mass shortages with Statistics Canada recently finding employment among childcare workers was 21% lower in February 2021 compared to a year before – putting it far ahead the 3% decrease in total employment at the same time. With a growing need for workers in the care economy, training workers quickly and with the right skills is necessary to meet labour shortage needs.

Diverse, resilient and nimble employees will help Canada's economy recover. Colleges are essential to producing this talent. Collaborating with industry and community leaders, colleges create opportunities that get Canadians into the workforce and help those who need to retrain get back to work. Colleges prepare learners for the work; 6.3MM Canadians, the largest sector of workforce, are college grads. Experience-based learning helps people build the employment-focused skills they need to thrive immediately in the workforce.

Education has changed. Learners expect to be future-proofed. Colleges anticipate the needs of our economy, then train, upskill and reskill thinkers and doers. And they do it fast.

Throughout the pandemic, colleges were quick to pivot to online learning, support community health efforts, and partner with small- and medium-sized enterprises to support their research and commercialization needs. Colleges have been on the forefront of educational change, responding to the demand for fast, accessible programming with a growing number of short accessible courses that allow learners to quickly acquire competencies and in-demand skills, including through microcredentials, continuing education and contract training. These offerings help people to rapidly upgrade their skills, provide access to talent development for Indigenous learners, and facilitate the integration of newcomers in the labour market.

Attracting international talent through immigration and increasing access to the labour market for underrepresented groups will play a critical role in tackling labour and skills gaps and meeting the needs of Canadian employers. Colleges offer inclusive programs for all learners, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those who have a disability, or who are from diverse cultural, ethnic and language groups.

² Kevin Orland, “Banks facing severe talent shortage, RBC chief executive says,” Bloomberg News, Jan 12, 2022, <https://financialpost.com/fp-finance/banking/rbc-ceo-mckay-sees-war-for-talent-topping-list-of-2022-concerns>.

³ Nathan Janzen and Rannella Billy-Ochieng, “Squeeze Play: Higher wages alone won't solve Canada's labour shortage problem,” RBC Thought Leadership, November 9, 2021, <https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/squeeze-play-higher-wages-alone-wont-solve-canadas-labour-shortage-problem/>.

Stats Canada, “The Daily: Job vacancies, fourth quarter 2021,” March 22, 2022, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220322/dq220322a-eng.htm>.

⁴ Janzen and Billy-Ochieng, RBC, “Squeeze Play.”

⁵ Emerald Bensadoun, “Health care job vacancies in Canada are soaring despite COVID-19 demand. Here's why.” Global News, March 24, 2021, <https://globalnews.ca/news/7713735/job-vacancies-canada-coronavirus/>.

⁶ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/211124/dq211124d-eng.htm>

Colleges are the primary access point to post-secondary education and skills development for Indigenous learners and play an important role in fostering reconciliation, with more than 300 credential programs tailored to Indigenous learners and communities.

Colleges are the backbone of Canada’s care economy. With 1900 health or bioscience related programs across 680 locations in every region of Canada, more than 80% of postsecondary credentials (certificates, diplomas and degrees) in health and related fields are granted by colleges (See Box 1). Whether to do a two or two-year diploma in dental hygiene or food and nutrition management, a Bachelor of Nursing, a primary care paramedic certificate, or a microcredential to prepare for a career in health care, most individuals in the care economy walk through the doors of a college or institute throughout their career.

Box 1: Examples of College Programs for the Care Economy		
Program	Duration	Credential
Primary Care Paramedic	8 months	Certificate
Addictions and Mental Health	1 year	Post-graduate certificate
911 and Public Safety Communications	1 year	Certificate
Brain Disorders Management	1 year or less	Post-graduate certificate
Transfusion Medicine Techniques	4 months	Certificate
Athletic & Exercise Therapy	4 years	Degree
Graduate Nurse, Internationally Educated Re-entry	1 year	Post-graduate certificate
Support Clients with Respiratory Health Conditions	8 hours	Microcredential
Dental Hygiene	2 years	Diploma
Nursing	4 years	Baccalaureate Degree
Food and Nutrition Management	2 years	Diploma

College education – innovations in training

Training at colleges, institutes, cegeps and polytechnics is a competency-based approach to learning that reinforces the link with the labour force. Graduates acquire pertinent knowledge and learn needed technical competencies and soft skills. Competencies in each program are developed, assessed, and regularly updated by faculty with industry experience in consultation with private and public-sector employers, ensuring graduates continue to have the skills employers seek. This collaboration with employers ensures that colleges remain responsive to the realities of local and regional economies.

Addressing labour shortages across the Canadian economy will take a coordinated, collaborative approach among a variety of stakeholders. A recent study by Statistics Canada investigated the educational strategies of prime-aged, displaced workers use to cope with job loss. Researchers found that regardless of a displaced workers’ initial educational attainment, the most frequent option selected after job loss is one-year programs, with career, technical and professional training programs generally the preferred option. This demonstrates that Canadians are looking for short, career-focussed education when looking to reskill or upskill and are turning to colleges to gain just that.

The pandemic has accelerated the pace of change in the postsecondary education sector and new approaches to training are gaining traction. Microcredentials have emerged in response to the need for employees to gain new competencies quickly. The resulting need for upskilling and reskilling has created a trend toward these short courses that focus on specific competencies required by employers. In 2020 CICan surveyed our members to understand their thinking about and approaches to microcredentials. The scan showed a great interest in microcredentials across Canada and a degree of agreement on the value of microcredentials. Respondents saw them as an important component of their range of programs and agree that they should be, flexible, validated, accessible to vulnerable populations., and designed so that they could be grouped together to form a greater credential. All stressed the importance of involving business and industry partners in developing these courses.

CICan’s members have regularly leveraged new technologies such as simulations, augmented reality and virtual reality to help students develop confidence and competency in cost-effective ways. The serious limitations put on in-person work-integrated learning (WIL), especially for clinical placements in the care

economy, by the pandemic has brought transformative changes to colleges' learning approaches and led to the significant growth of practical training via simulation and virtual reality.

While colleges have embraced innovative approaches, they have faced significant challenges that have put in peril their ability to respond quickly to the needs of employers and of students. Provincial funding to institutions has stagnated since 2010, institutions have increasingly relied on tuition dollars to fund their operations.⁷ This dependence has impacted colleges' ability to adapt and provide essential program developments and update the infrastructure and labs necessary to train many in the care economy. To address labour and skills shortages in both the short and long terms more funding for publicly supported colleges is needed. With the right supports, colleges can continue to innovate with the cutting-edge pedagogy and tools to provide the competencies employers need.

⁷ <https://higherstrategy.com/community-college-revenues-2019-20/>.

3. Developing Responsive Labour Market Training for the Care Economy

Canada's colleges and institutes offer training responsive to labour market needs through collaboration with local industry partners. Working with members across Canada, CICan has developed national projects to address labour and skills shortages, particularly in the care economy. Colleges have repeatedly worked with partners to provide innovative solutions to labour market needs, demonstrating their flexibility and speed. Below are two examples of innovative programs launched during the pandemic to address bottlenecks in training healthcare workers.

Building Capacity in Long-term Care

In December 2020, CICan and ESDC launched the Building Capacity in Long-term Care project. This pilot project is a national initiative to address the acute labour shortages in the long-term care sector exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic by developing and implementing the Supportive Care Assistant Program, a fully subsidized micro-certificate.

The project tests a new recruitment and training model for Supportive Care Assistants (SCA) with an accelerated 6-week online training program, followed by a paid work placement, while developing a career advancement pathway to these workers to upgrade their microcredential to a full Personal Support Workers (PSWs) certificate. CICan is also working with members and key stakeholders to create a national occupational standard for the personal care provider role.

Virtu-WIL

WIL and clinical placement opportunities for healthcare students are necessary to equip them with in-demand, work-ready skills and ensure they are prepared for practice. These opportunities in healthcare, already quite limited, have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. CICan has collaborated with Simulation Canada, and with post-secondary institutions from across the country, on designing and delivering the Virtu-WIL project. This initiative helps students in three healthcare programs (nursing, medical laboratory sciences and paramedicine) acquire practical, job-ready competencies and make valuable connections with employers.

Over 130 virtual simulations have been developed enabling 4000 students, 25% of whom are from under-represented groups, to complete the Virtu-WIL Program between September 2021 and March 31, 2022. Students are presented with a clinical situation where they investigate a situation, make decisions and receive feedback.

Through projects and partnerships, CICan and its members have found coordinated approaches that can be scaled up broadly and are effective to address challenges with a national scope. These programs are only possible because of the flexible, responsive training environment provided by Canada's college system. Using models developed to address shortages of workers in the LTC project and virtual tools that could be easily deployed to students to give them virtual WIL experiences are projects that can be retooled for any sector in need. As these projects demonstrate, CICan and our members can quickly deploy innovative solutions and approaches to meet labour market needs.

SCA Graduate Testimonial

Four months after arriving in Canada, Bunmi Oni enrolled in the SCA program at Saskatchewan Polytechnic. She had previously worked in banking but was interested in a health care career. Bunmi received six weeks of free online training and then started a two-month paid work placement with Sanctum Care Group in Saskatoon. "The experience gained during the work placement was an unforgettable one, I was able to put into practice and enhance the skills learned in the online training." The program not only introduced her to a career in long-term care, but it also inspired her to further her studies to become a continuing care assistant. She dreams of one day becoming a licensed practical nurse and is thankful the program is helping her along her career path. After completing the SCA program, Sanctum Care Group offered her full-time work.

4. Looking ahead: Colleges and the care economy

With Canada facing unprecedented labour and skills shortages, Canada's colleges are crucial partners in ensuring workers are well equipped to grow the economy. In that vein and to support workers transitioning into the care economy, CICan makes the following recommendations.

Upskilling and Reskilling for the Care Economy

ESDC anticipates between 37,000 and 47,000 early childhood educator jobs will be needed to achieve the expansion of early childhood education (ECE) from the government's commitment to affordable childcare.⁸ While the labour market demand in LTC is predicted to grow over the next thirty years as the number of Canadians over the age of 85 triples. Workers in these two critical care economy fields will be needed to address the increased demand.

Colleges across the country are the primary education and training providers for the ECE workers, with over 200 programs across Canada. Colleges have the proven capability of accelerating the recruitment of unemployed and displaced workers and underrepresented groups, including Indigenous people and newcomers.

Colleges across the country are well-positioned to address these critical skills demands. By enabling pathways to training that allow individuals to quickly upskill or reskill, colleges can help meet the labour demands of the care economy. Using innovative programs and tools, colleges enable practical training for those in the care economy. Access to WIL ensures that learners have the hands-on experience needed to feel comfortable and confident as they enter their new occupations.

While education is a provincial responsibility, federal support for - and recognition of - innovative course delivery formats like microcredentials will be essential for promoting their adoption. This will speed-up training and promote understanding of these credentials within the broader economy.

Recommendation: Enable Canadians to quickly upskill or reskill to fill roles in the care economy by providing federal support for the development of flexible and accessible training options and innovative learning pathways, such as microcredentials, that build a stronger, higher quality and more resilient care economy workforce.

Recommendation: Increase access to work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities and clinical placements, including investing in innovative approaches to WIL, to ensure those in the care economy are properly equipped with the skills and competencies to succeed.

⁸ [EFU-MEB-2021-EN.pdf \(budget.gc.ca\)](#)

5. Colleges and Labour Market Needs

Critical Skills Infrastructure

The modern delivery of education needs investments in innovative training spaces. Despite limited opportunities for federal funding, there is a great need for infrastructure support on campuses. Training for tomorrow's jobs will require up-to-date infrastructure, which requires an investment from the federal government. Incorporating new technologies into their learning spaces will prepare learners with necessary competencies as they enter the workforce. As healthcare and other sectors in the care economy increasingly rely on digital tools and spaces, learners will need to be trained in a similar environment to ensure they hit the ground running and there is little disruption to Canada's care economy talent pipeline. Investments in infrastructure for occupations in the care economy are crucial to ensure learners can thrive in the fast-paced environments for which they are preparing, and Canada can meet the sector's training needs.

Recommendation: Ensure healthcare workers and others in the care economy have access to training spaces to enter and advance in their careers through infrastructure investments that increase laboratory and classroom spaces at public colleges.

Informing Career Counselling

The Labour Market Information Council's recommendations to improve the quality of Canada's labour market information (LMI) tools describes the current state of Canadian LMI as one with disparate and varied stakeholders, available information lacking granularity, and significant limitations existing on available data.⁹ The 2017 Advisory Council on Economic Growth expected 10% of Canadian workers would be affected by career transitions by 2030 however McKinsey and Co have revised that recently estimating an additional 25% of the workforce will be impacted by career transitions by 2030.¹⁰ This impending shift in the workforce, expected to occur in the 2020s, will require labour market data to inform career counselling services of the jobs and competencies needed in particular regions.

The lack of clear LMI is particularly damaging to the care economy, as prospective students are unaware of the opportunities in number of specialized care economy positions. Students graduating high school are often unaware of lucrative, high-demand roles like respiratory therapists and imaging technologists. To help students plot their future, and to help colleges respond to developing skills demands, Canada must invest in a robust and comprehensive LMI.

Recommendation: Support Canada's labour market with a renewed focus on labour market information to ensure training needs are responding to labour and skills needs of the care economy.

International Students and Immigration

Skilled newcomers and international students are both key components of Canada's broader global talent and immigration strategy. Colleges support immigrant integration by offering settlement services including second language training and bridging to employment programs. Given that currently one-third of childcare workers are immigrants or non-permanent residents, colleges play an important role in bridging newcomers to the workforce. Colleges deliver language training for the workplace to enable newcomers to quickly integrate into the labour market. Recent Statistics Canada data found in 2019, international students accounted for 7.5% of graduates from Canadian health care programs; of these more than two-thirds graduated from college programs.¹¹

Transitioning international learners to permanent residency represents an important opportunity to add needed skilled workers to the labour force, especially in smaller or mid-sized communities. International students are eager for pathways to permanent residency as demonstrated by the response to the April 2020 announcement that opened new pathway to permanent residency for recent grads in essential occupations and health care. When applications opened, it took only 24 hours for the 40,000 anglophone spots for international students to

⁹ <https://lmic-cimt.ca/challenges-and-opportunities-in-canadas-lmi-landscape/>

¹⁰ <https://fsc-ccf.ca/blog-career-development/>

¹¹ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/211124/dq211124d-eng.htm>

be filled.^{12, 13} As experts in content development and with a well-established method of developing programming to meet the needs of employers, colleges are well positioned to be key partners in language training for the care economy. By working with members across Canada a national approach to occupational language training can be developed for newcomers in the care economy.

Recommendation: Boost Canada's talent pool through the development and implementation of permanent residency streams for international students graduating from colleges and equip colleges to improve labour market outcomes of international students and permanent residents by providing additional support throughout their transition to Canada.

¹² Government of Canada, *New pathway to permanent residency for over 90,000 essential temporary workers and international graduates*
<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2021/04/new-pathway-to-permanent-residency-for-over-90000-essential-temporary-workers-and-international-graduates.html>

¹³ IRCC, *Update on the temporary pathways to permanent residence, 2021*
<https://twitter.com/CitImmCanada/status/1390714038124961802>.