

NEWS RELEASE

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Over 2 million Canadians could soon have a Family Doctor under Federal Parties Promise to Fund More Doctors thanks in large part to Canadians who have Studied Medicine Abroad

So far two federal parties have promised to fund the hiring of more physicians as part of their federal election platform. This is great news, and many Canadians could have a family doctor in a little more than 2 years if these new funds are directed to new residency positions for Canadian Citizens and Permanent Residents who earned medical degrees abroad and have passed all required Canadian exams.

This is the fastest, most cost effective approach to delivering on a commitment to fund more doctors. We don't need to recruit more doctors from foreign countries; and taxpayers don't need to fund expensive new medical school places and wait over 6 years for their new doctors.

Right now there are more than 1,700 fully qualified Canadian and Permanent Resident medical graduates who studied medicine abroad, passed all required exams of the Medical Council of Canada, and applied for residency training in Canada. Yet, only about 400 of them will be able to be licensed to practice in Canada due to a lack of residency positions for them to train.

Most Canadians have no idea we are turning away our own qualified doctors from practice in Canada year after year. Why? For a number of solvable reasons, including:

- a shortage of funding for residency training positions, and
- a shortage of training resources for medical residency programs, exacerbated by the continued "residency training for sale" approach of Canadian medical schools that dedicate scarce residency resources to train more than 1,000 foreign visa trainees from Saudi Arabia and other countries. These foreign doctors take up good paying jobs and scarce residency training positions that could be filled by qualified Canadians.

Because of the many barriers graduates of medical schools outside Canada face in trying to come home to practice medicine, most qualified Canadian Citizens and Permanent Residents doctors have no choice but to leave Canada to practice medicine in other countries. Most end up in residency training in the US and Australia where they are welcomed as highly capable internationally trained physicians. Many Canadian doctors who were educated and trained outside of Canada are forced to emigrate to the US and Australia permanently due to the many barriers they face in trying to return to Canada to practice medicine.

The election promises are on the right track - funding to hire more doctors will be most effective if it is directed at funding residency positions for qualified Canadian Citizen and Permanent Residents doctors who were educated and/or trained abroad. It is exciting because it is achievable in the near future.

Assuming 500 new residency positions are filled each year for a period of 5 years from more than 1,700 qualified Canadian doctors trained abroad, over 2 million more Canadians could have a family physician. This is a reliable long term source of qualified doctors as many Canadians continue to choose to study medicine abroad. These Canadians have the advantage of being able to bring home international knowledge, innovation, and contacts to address the challenges our health care system faces.

We need our governments to commit to funding more residency positions for Canadians and use our limited resources to hire and train Canadians instead of foreigners. It would be a welcome relief for Canadians in need and deserving of adequate health care services in accordance with the Canadian Health Care Act.

The Society of Canadians Studying Medicine Abroad is calling on all parties involved in the funding, recruitment and training of Canadian physicians to do the right thing for Canadians – to prioritise all medical training positions for Canadian Citizens and Permanent Residents, to fund more residency training to provide Canadians with enough doctors, and to prioritize training and recruiting Canadian doctors over recruiting and training foreign doctors.

- 30 -

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