

Skilled arrivals to get aid

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Immigrants who brought an education and skills with them to Waterloo Region will get help from the Ontario government's budget.

Waterloo Region can expect to get money for programs to help new Canadians who were educated internationally but cannot get jobs in their field, said Mary Anne Chambers, minister of training, colleges and universities.

"There has been that cry . . . for help from the Kitchener- Waterloo region," Chambers said in an interview yesterday.

The programs would help new Canadians become licensed, get certified or find employment.

Many are engineers. There are also accountants, lawyers, nurses, physicians, pharmacists, medical technologists and others, she said.

Chambers said she's reviewing funding proposals from area community organizations, and expects to announce the money within the next few months.

This area has the fifth largest immigrant population among Canadian cities. Immigrants make up 22 per cent of the population.

More and more immigrants who arrive in Waterloo Region are very highly educated, said Maria Alvarez, director of cross-cultural and community services at the YMCA.

"We're receiving a very high number of professionals in the area," Alvarez said in an interview.

They have master's and doctoral degrees and "most are not working in their own field."

Chambers said the University of Waterloo has already received some funding to move ahead with programs at its new health sciences campus for internationally trained pharmacy graduates.

"I think there's another opportunity there to do more in the Kitchener-Waterloo area."

The money will come out of the additional \$6.2 billion promised in the budget to universities and colleges over the next five years. Specifically, \$400 million is for training, including apprenticeships and incentives for people trained in other countries.

A concept tested in Toronto called the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council will be moved out to other areas of the province, including Waterloo Region, Chambers said. The council helps new Canadians work in the careers for which they're trained.

Rich Janzen, research director with the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services, said immigrants face many systemic barriers to finding jobs related to their education.

Nationally, six in 10 immigrants who are working in Canada are not working in their field of expertise, said Janzen, whose centre is an independent, non-profit social research organization.

Any help from the province "would be very welcome," he said.

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