

THE MMAC'S POSITION STATEMENT ON ONTARIO'S RECENT CHANGE IN ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR IMGs APPLYING TO RESIDENCY

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BACKGROUND

The Ontario Ministry of Health recently [announced](#) a change in the eligibility requirements for International Medical Graduates (IMGs) applying to residency. Effective with the 2026 R-1 Match, eligibility for Ontario-designated International Medical Graduate (IMG) residency positions in the first iteration will be limited to the IMG applicants “who obtained, or are in the process of obtaining, their undergraduate medical degree (MD) abroad and who have completed a minimum of two years of secondary school education in Ontario”.

This abrupt change was announced after many IMGs had already invested substantial time, money, and effort in preparing for the upcoming PGY1 CaRMS match. IMGs play a vital role in supporting Canada's healthcare system, particularly in addressing physician shortages in underserved communities. This policy serves to restrict the participation of well qualified IMGs and undermines existing efforts to continue to build a fair, equitable, and sustainable healthcare workforce.

POSITION

We, the Muslim Medical Association of Canada (MMAC), strongly oppose this discriminatory, short-sighted, and counterproductive policy change. For more than a decade, we have organized mentorship programs and workshops supporting IMGs, helping many successfully match into competitive residency specialties. Today, many of these IMGs serve as attending physicians and leaders across Ontario. Through this work, we have witnessed firsthand the talent, resilience, and dedication IMGs bring to patient care. Given our experience in supporting this community, we are well-positioned to advocate on their behalf and to contribute meaningfully to policy discussions that impact their future and the future of healthcare in Ontario.

We call for the immediate reversal of this policy for the 2025-2026 CaRMS cycle and for a comprehensive reassessment in consultation with key stakeholders.

RATIONALE

1. By determining eligibility based on the location of one's high school education rather than professional merit, this policy effectively discriminates against immigrants and racialized Canadian physicians, groups already underrepresented in medical training. It also unfairly privileges individuals who were raised in Ontario over equally qualified candidates who have chosen to make Ontario their home.
2. There is no evidence to suggest that attending high school in Ontario, or residing in the province for a certain number of years, predicts where a physician will ultimately practice. Excluding IMGs on the basis of such arbitrary and exclusionary criteria disregards both their longstanding contributions to Ontario's healthcare system and the principles of fairness and inclusion that should underpin all public policy. If the intent of this policy is to retain physicians in Ontario, existing return-of-service agreements already ensure that IMGs contribute to underserved areas upon completion of their training.
3. At a time when more than two million Ontarians lack a family doctor and specialist wait times are among the longest in the country, excluding IMGs who didn't do high school in Ontario from the

first iteration of residency positions is counterproductive. This policy effectively channels IMGs toward less competitive specialties, further limiting their opportunities. Each excluded IMG represents a lost opportunity; a family physician who could reduce emergency room visits, a neurologist who could reduce wait times, a pediatrician who could provide care in Northern communities. When doors are closed to these physicians, they are also closed to the patients who need them most.

4. This policy also undermines Ontario's competitiveness. Other provinces and countries will readily welcome these highly skilled professionals, along with the global perspectives and cultural competence they bring, qualities that are essential to serving Ontario's increasingly diverse population. Ontario cannot afford to drive talent away at a time of such urgent need.
5. Residency programs must have the freedom to select the most qualified candidates based on merit, not the postal code of their high school. Policies that de-emphasize fairness and equity risk not only undermining public trust but also diminishing the quality of physicians entering our healthcare system.

CALL TO ACTION

We urge the Ontario Ministry of Health to:

1. **Immediately reverse this policy** and restore first-round CaRMS eligibility for all qualified IMGs
2. **Engage meaningfully with stakeholders**, including IMG applicants, organizations representing IMGs, medical associations, and diversity advocacy groups, to ensure future policies are equitable and inclusive
3. **Commit to transparent, evidence-based policymaking** that aligns with Ontario's stated goals of equity, inclusion, and addressing physician shortages.

CONCLUSION

Ontario's healthcare system is at a breaking point, and exclusionary policies like this only deepen the crisis. At a time when patients are waiting longer than ever for care, we cannot afford to turn away skilled, dedicated, and qualified physicians who are ready to serve our communities. Let's open doors, not close them.

We urge the government to immediately rescind this policy and to work collaboratively with healthcare organizations, educators, and internationally trained medical graduates to develop fair, evidence-based solutions that strengthen our physician workforce. As an organization with extensive experience supporting and mentoring IMGs, we would welcome the opportunity to contribute to these discussions and to help build a system that reflects Ontario's values of equity, inclusion, and excellence in patient care.