



## Does this sound like equality?

International students pay hundreds of dollars for basic health care, thousands of dollars in tuition fee premiums, are not eligible for student aid in Canada and often face stereotyping, racism, and xenophobia.

While Canadian students in Manitoba have benefited from the tuition fee freeze since 1999, international students have been subjected to massive new tuition fee increases since 2002. In fact, international students in Manitoba now pay up to 215% more than their Canadian counterparts and, in some cases, have seen their tuition fees more than double in one year.

But, in addition to exorbitant tuition fees, international students are also vulnerable to a host of other costs, including student housing prices, study permit costs and financial prerequisites, flights and health-related costs. International students in Manitoba pay an additional \$420 a year just to see a doctor, something that most of us will never have to pay for. Health-related costs, when coupled with already sky-high tuition fees, constitute additional barriers to access to Canadian universities for international students. The other option, to study in Canada without basic health protection, is risky, as health emergencies and unanticipated health costs could be devastating.

## An Important Part of Manitoba's Immigration Strategy

Charging international students for basic health coverage ignores not only the social and cultural benefits of welcoming international students to Manitoba, but also the economic and fiscal contributions they make. They contribute by paying taxes, spending in the local economy, providing labour and helping establish or strengthen long-term business relationships between Canada and a student's home country. Immigration is an important element of Manitoba's labour market and population growth strategy, making it drastically out of step with

the province's identified immigration goals to increase barriers for international students. In fact, by 2011, it is estimated that immigration will account for virtually all labour force growth in the country. According to the federal government's research, immigrants who have previously worked or studied in Canada have the least difficulty integrating into the Canadian workforce and prospering in Canadian society. Differential user fees like tuition and health insurance, as well as massive student debt, create a barrier that will discourage such motivated and skilled people from studying, and possibly settling, in Canada.

## Manitoba a leader?

Manitoba has always been a leader in recognising the important role that international students play in Manitoba. It was the first province to include post-secondary graduates in its Provincial Nominee immigration criteria and introduce the off-campus work programme for international students. Many international students who study in Manitoba hope to pursue a career in Manitoba and set up roots here. However, when it comes to providing universal health coverage for international students, Manitoba has fallen behind. In 2007, Newfoundland and Labrador announced that it would provide health coverage to international students as an integral part of its immigration strategy. Saskatchewan also provides basic provincial health coverage to international students from the day they arrive in the province and British Columbia provides health insurance to international students at the same rate it is available to all other B.C. residents.

The cost to the Manitoba government to provide basic provincial health coverage to international students enrolled in post-secondary institutions would be under \$1.38 million annually—less than 0.04% of the total provincial health budget. Providing basic health care to these students is both affordable and reasonable, especially when one considers that the province already provides free health care to international students who choose to work off campus.

## Unequal benefits and burdens

Since the off-campus work pilot programme was expanded into a national programme in 2006, international students who receive a work permit now also receive free provincial health coverage for the duration of their work permit (in most cases four years). This was an important move, but it has created an unequal playing field for international students in Manitoba: those who choose to work off campus in effect pay only the cost of a work permit (\$150 per year) for their health coverage, while those who choose to work on campus or not to work at all must pay \$1,680 over the course of a four-year degree for their basic health coverage.

It doesn't have to be this way.

This is a problem that could easily be rectified by providing free health coverage to all international students.

As part of the campaign for equality for international students, the Canadian Federation of Students is calling on the Government of Manitoba to ensure that all students be able to see a doctor in Manitoba, without paying user fees.

## What you can do

- Write to the Honourable Theresa Oswald, Minister of Health, and Nancy Allan, Minister of Labour & Immigration, to let the Manitoba government know that you think all students should be able to see a doctor in Manitoba.
- Collaborate with your students' union to meet with representatives of your school's international office to let the university know you support universal public health coverage for all international students.
- Send letters to the editor of your campus or local newspaper.
- Encourage other students to support universal public health coverage for all international students.

To learn more about the campaign for equality for international students, visit your local students' union office or check out [www.cfsmb.ca](http://www.cfsmb.ca).

**“International students represent a large potential pool of immigrants to the province. These students are highly skilled, talented, and creative young people who have already adjusted to our culture and our weather, and have likely made friends and connections in the community.**

**In addition, international students have credentials that are easily recognized by local employers, and international graduates have specific skill sets that could be useful in sectors with impending skill shortages or high turnover rates (i.e., university faculty, medical sector).”**

*From Newfoundland and Labrador Immigration Strategy, 2007*



Fact Sheet

**International Students' Health Coverage**