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PUBLICATION

Employment Update: Ontario Workforce Priority Stream - New Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program

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Effective June 2026, Ontario has rolled out the initial phase of a major overhaul of the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program ("OINP"). The OINP is governed by the *Ontario Immigration Act, 2015* and its regulations. Under this overhaul, the eight former immigration streams have been consolidated into four, with the new Ontario Workforce Priority Stream ("OWP") being the first to launch. Further streams are anticipated to follow later this year.

The new OWP Stream includes three pathways:

- Workers in TEER 0–3 with a qualifying job offer and work experience;
- Workers in TEER 4–5 with a qualifying job offer and work experience; and
- Self-Employed Physician Pathway for eligible physicians who do not have a job offer.

Key eligibility changes

The new OWP Stream introduces updated eligibility requirements that vary depending on the pathway.

Some of the most significant changes include:

- If you have a job offer under TEER 0–3, you must have one of the following:

- A minimum of six consecutive months of paid, full-time work experience in the position specified in the job offer, completed within the 12 months preceding the application date.
- For recent Ontario graduates, a minimum of three consecutive months of paid, full-time work experience in the job offer position, completed within the 12 months preceding the application date. You must have graduated from an eligible Ontario institution within the last 3 years with one of the following: post-secondary degree or diploma that took at least 2 years to complete on a full-time basis; Ontario College Graduate Certificate; Master's degree; or PhD degree.
- A minimum of two years of cumulative paid, full-time work experience (or the equivalent in part-time hours) in the same NOC occupation as the job offer position, completed within the

five years preceding the application date. Where the job offer position falls under NOC 33102, NOC Sub-Major Group 223, or NOC 33103, experience in a different but permissible position may also count.
- Licence or other authorization required under Ontario or federal law to work in the job offer position.

- If you have a job offer under TEER 4 –5, you must have:

- A minimum of nine months of cumulative, paid, full-time work experience in the position for which your employer is seeking approval, as set out in the job offer.
- This experience must have been gained within the two years preceding the date you submitted your application.

- If you have a job offer position for a TEER category 0, 1, 2 or 3 NOC occupation, you must have one of the following:

- Canadian Language Benchmark ("CLB") level 6 or higher in all four language proficiencies if the job offer position is not a NOC occupation listed as a skilled trade on the OINP site. CLB level 5 or higher in all four language proficiencies if the job offer is a skilled trade listed on the OINP site.

- If you have a job offer position for a TEER category 4 or 5 position, you must have:

- CLB level 4 or higher in all four language proficiencies;
- Minimum education requirements for applicants under the TEER 0–3 and if you have a job offer under TEER category 4 or 5, you must have a Canadian high school diploma or its equivalent from another country.

Other notable program changes include:

- Expanded eligibility to include workers in all NOC TEER 0–5 occupations, rather than limiting eligibility to designated occupations;

- A new pathway for eligible self-employed physicians, who are no longer required to have a traditional employer job offer;

- Lower employer revenue thresholds for eligible employers located in Northern and rural Ontario, allowing more small businesses to participate in the program; and

- Continued emphasis on permanent, full-time employment with eligible Ontario employers.

Changes affecting Ontario employers

The redesigned program also introduces several changes for employers sponsoring foreign workers.

Employers in eligible Northern and rural Ontario communities will benefit from lower minimum gross annual revenue thresholds, allowing more small and medium-sized businesses to participate in the OINP.

Ontario has also strengthened employer compliance obligations and enforcement measures under the *Working for Workers Six Act, 2024*, as part of its continued efforts to improve program integrity and address fraud and misrepresentation.

Expression of interest system transition

As part of the transition, Ontario temporarily closed the OINP Expression of Interest ("EOI") system.

All EOIs that have not received an Invitation to Apply will be withdrawn, and no further invitations will be issued under the former OINP streams. Once the new EOI system reopens, which is expected later this summer, employers will be required to submit new job offers through the Employer Portal, and applicants will be required to submit new EOIs under the OWP stream.

Applications already submitted under the previous OINP streams will continue to be processed under the eligibility requirements that existed at the time they were filed.

New EOI scoring system

Ontario has also released the new EOI scoring framework for the OWP Stream.

The new EOI scoring system places greater emphasis on factors that demonstrate a candidate's ability to successfully integrate into Ontario's labour market. Points are awarded based on several factors, including Ontario work experience, Canadian income tax history, wages, official language proficiency, bilingualism, education, occupation, temporary resident status, and the location of the job offer. Education is credited under both job-offer routes. Candidates with job offers outside the Greater Toronto Area may receive additional regional points, while occupations in the health care sector receive the highest occupational scores, followed by skilled trades and transportation occupations. Those holding work permits score more highly than those holding study permits.

Eligible self-employed physicians are evaluated under an adapted version of the EOI scoring system that leaves out the wage factor and instead grants work-experience points based on cumulative medical practice within Ontario. A detailed breakdown of the EOI scoring factors and point allocations is available at https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-workforce-priority-stream

These changes represent the most significant overhaul of the OINP in recent years and reflect Ontario's continued focus on aligning provincial immigration with labour market demands, strengthening program integrity, and improving pathways for employers seeking to recruit and retain skilled workers.

If you have questions about the Ontario Workforce Priority Stream or how these changes may affect your business, please reach out to a member of Blaney's Employment & Labour Group.

The information contained in this article is intended to provide information and comment, in a general fashion, about recent developments in the law and related practice points of interest.

The information and views expressed are not intended to provide legal advice. For specific legal advice, please contact us.