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**For Information**

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**REPORT TITLE:      Regional Supports and the Impact to International Students in Peel**

**FROM:                      Janice Sheehy, Commissioner of Human Services**

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**OBJECTIVE**

To provide Regional Council with an overview of Region of Peel supports and the impact to international students.

**REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- In 2014, the Government of Canada implemented an International Education Strategy to complement efforts by provinces, territories, and stakeholders toward a collective goal of a sustainable and successful international education sector.
  - International student enrolment has been on the rise within Canadian colleges and universities, having increased 68 per cent between 2014-2018.
  - In Peel, a total of 12,100 international students were granted first study permits in 2019 to attend Designated Learning Institutions.
  - Although International students are eligible to access largely community-based programming, many regional programs are not accessible due to federal and provincial eligibility criteria where applicants must be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident or a refugee claimant.
  - The pandemic response identified barriers for international students such as: language, awareness of resources, health care coverage, and federal or provincial program eligibility requirements.
  - A community roundtable and summit are being planned; engaging regional participation would expand understanding of the subject and could identify actions within the scope of regional responsibilities, such as advocacy.
  - However, it is important to note that the Federal and Provincial governments have the jurisdiction and responsibility for the international student program, including policies, regulations, and strategies.
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**DISCUSSION**

**1. Background**

On September 9, 2021, Regional Council received a joint delegation from One Voice Canada and Punjabi Community Health Services outlining the difficulties faced by international students in Peel Region (Resolution 2021-924).

A similar delegation was also received by City of Brampton Council in September. The presentations highlighted the findings of a recent survey of international students experience which outlined the following challenges:

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- Overcrowded housing, illegal basement units
- Labour exploitation
- Mental health and addictions
- Sexual exploitation, human trafficking
- Student recruitment programs
- High tuition fees
- Poor economic outcomes for graduates
- Private Ontario colleges contribution to poor outcomes

The delegates requested Regional Council's support, through advocacy to the Government of Canada, to review and reform policies related to international students. Regional Council requested that the Commissioner of Human Services report to a future meeting of Regional Council on the impact of international students in the Region of Peel on Regional Services (Resolution 2021-925).

## 2. Federal Policies Related to International Students

International student enrolment provides immense economic growth and stability within Canada, equaling \$21.6 billion in 2018. The Federal government has implemented policies with respect to international students, within the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations as well as the International Education Strategy.

In 2014, the Government of Canada amended the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations to strengthen the integrity of Canada's immigration program by explicitly requiring study permit holders to actively pursue their studies, reduce the number of poor-quality educational institutions, and facilitate the entry of foreign nationals that wish to obtain a Canadian education. Under these Regulations only Designated Learning Institutions (DLIs) may enroll international students which includes public, private, primary, and secondary schools<sup>1</sup>. In Peel, there are over 70 DLIs, of which, nine offer the Post Graduation Work Program that supports post graduate employment and student eligibility for permanent residency (see Appendix I).

The Government of Canada implemented an International Education Strategy in 2014, which was extended until 2024 (see Appendix II). The Strategy is to support and complement efforts by provinces, territories, and stakeholders toward a collective goal of a sustainable and successful international education sector. With these changes, international student enrolment has been on the rise within colleges and universities, having increased 68 per cent between the years of 2014-2018 (Government of Canada, 2020).

In Peel, a total of 12,100 (2019) international students were granted first study permits to attend DLIs (these numbers exclude renewal permit numbers). Of the first study permits granted, the top three countries of citizenship of international students were India (71.5 per cent), China (12 per cent) and Vietnam (2 per cent).<sup>2</sup> During the 2015-2019 period the top five source countries of citizenship for international students to Peel region were India, China, Vietnam, Nigeria, and South Korea. Peel Region benefits economically and attracts

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<sup>1</sup> Crossman, E., Choi Y, Hou F. (July 28, 2021) Stats Canada: International students as a source of labour supply; The growing number of international students and their changing sociodemographic characteristics

<sup>2</sup> Longitudinal Immigrant Database, 2019

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talented and highly educated human capital to the region, many of whom chose to make Peel their home.

### **3. Region of Peel Programming for International Students**

The Region of Peel has a variety of programs that are accessible by international students within Human Services and Public Health, however program level data is limited. Furthermore, the Region does not have direct jurisdiction to support international students, and program access is constrained due to federal and provincial government eligibility criteria. Government regulations indicate that program applicants must be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident or refugee claimant to qualify thus, resulting in international students not being eligible for programs such as Healthy Smiles Ontario, Ontario Works, or subsidized housing and child care.

International students can access the following regional programs and services:

#### **a) Housing**

International students can access emergency shelter services including support through a Housing Support Worker (program information and referrals). The Housing Stability Fund provides students with one-time financial support to obtain or maintain housing. In addition, Housing Services does share housing information in multiple languages with all private and public post-secondary institutions in Peel.

The Region also operated COVID-19 isolation and recovery sites. Between February 1 to September 30, 2021, 56 international students used the sites. Housing stability was identified as a concern for seven of these students. Upon exiting the sites, four of the six students experiencing homelessness went into the emergency shelter system, one gained temporary housing and one acquired stable housing. No data is available for the remaining student.

#### **b) Early Years and Child care**

International students with children aged 0-6 years can access free EarlyON programs for child development, parenting supports and resources. As well, international students who have children can attend licensed child care at full fee and, if needed, access Special Needs Resourcing Supports at no additional cost.

#### **c) Anti-Human Sex Trafficking**

As part of the Peel Anti-Human Sex Trafficking Strategy, there are currently two houses (Bonnie McPhee Safe House, Peel Transitional House) supporting females aged 16-24 years and a services hub (nCourage) providing case management, counselling, and other supports dedicated to victims, survivors, and individuals at-risk of human sex trafficking (ages 12-24 years). All services are accessible to international students.

#### **d) Public Health Services**

Public Health programs deliver a population-based health promotion and disease prevention approach that covers anyone in Peel, including international students. Examples of these programs include communicable disease prevention (i.e.: Tuberculosis (TB) Prevention and Control program, providing medical surveillance for active and inactive TB) and public health inspections of food and personal services that international students access. In addition, international students can

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access services in programs such as Healthy Babies, Healthy Children, Needle Exchange, and the post-secondary Drug Overdose Prevention program.

Furthermore, Public Health offers the Newcomer Vaccination program which provides childhood immunization catch ups.

### e) High Priority Community Strategy and Regional COVID-19 Response

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many regional programs and services shifted to support Peel's emergency response. The Region also worked closely with the lead agencies of the provincial funded High Priority Communities Strategy to deliver the Temporary COVID-19 Isolation Emergency Support Fund. The fund is distributed through the lead agencies to provide food and shelter supports to those individuals, including international students, for whom financial hardship poses a direct barrier to COVID-19 testing or completing a required period of isolation to help reduce the transmission of COVID-19 in high priority communities.

Through ongoing dialogue, the lead agencies have highlighted challenges faced by international students during the pandemic, (e.g.: virus transmission among underhoused, financial vulnerability during lockdown, potentially unsafe work environments, mental health, and addictions). The Regional pandemic response identified barriers in accessing programs and services such as language, awareness of resources, provincial health care coverage, and federal or provincial program eligibility requirements. Through these learnings, Public Health and Human Services is having ongoing conversations with institutions such as Sheridan College to coordinate how to better support international students.

In addition, the Region's vaccination plan partnered with educational settings (Sheridan, University of Toronto), health system partners (e.g.: Ontario Health), and HPCS lead agencies to support access to low barrier COVID-19 vaccine clinics. International students could receive vaccines with minimum documentation (e.g. OHIP, address).

## 4. Community Response to International Student Needs

Peel based not-for-profits and collectives have experienced firsthand the increasing social, and health demands of international students and the complexity of those needs.

Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy's Lived Experience Roundtable members have voiced concerns over the challenges that international students face such as food and housing insecurity, harmful employment practices and mental health. Census data is not available to identify the number of international students living in poverty. However, if these economic and social pressures are not addressed appropriately, the adverse impact could place international students at greater risk of poverty.

Peel Newcomer Strategy Group conducted research on the challenges faced by international students as outlined in a 2018 report, titled *International Student Needs Assessment Report*. A key report recommendation is that different levels of government, community organizations and educational institutions have an opportunity to coordinate resources.

In September 2021, Indus Community Services and Punjabi Community Health Services, acting together as Apna Health, released a report titled *Invited & Forgotten: International*

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*Students' Issues in Peel 2021*. The report noted that integrating international students into Canadian society for the purpose of equitable benefit is not simplistic. The experiences, and barriers faced when seeking to navigate the complex reality of living and studying in Canada must be recognized to adequately support these students.

The University of Toronto Mississauga campus, and Sheridan College (Peel campuses) are two of the longest standing public educational institutions in Peel, with international student enrolment levels, representing both first year and renewal permits, at:

- Sheridan - 5,758 students from 110 countries (2020/2021)
- University of Toronto Mississauga campus - 4,400 students from 130 countries (2021/2022)

Both DLIs provide numerous supports on and off campus for international students, through dedicated international student centres and online 24/7 mental health supports. It is important to note DLIs across Peel do not provide standard supports to international students. For example, mandatory health insurance coverage is a provincial requirement for all public universities such as University of Toronto Mississauga campus. There is no government policy requiring public and private colleges, or private universities to provide health insurance, although Sheridan College provides mandatory health insurance to international students through student fees.

Due the significant challenges faced by international students, the Peel community is planning the establishment of a roundtable with representation from not-for-profits, collectives, government, and educational institutions to strengthen the understanding of international student circumstances and explore opportunities. The roundtable will share information at a stakeholder summit to be hosted early 2022, which is intended to identify actions for change.

Regional staff will participate in the roundtable and the summit, to enhance the awareness of the supports being provided in Peel, to better understand the challenges being faced by international students, and to identify actions within the scope of the municipality. It is important to note, however, that the Federal and Provincial government have jurisdiction and responsibility for the international student program.

## CONCLUSION

The Regional pandemic response and partnerships emphasized the complexity of challenges international students face and identified gaps in services and programs. The Government of Canada, through its International Education Strategy, is committed to investing in the international education sector until 2024, which will continue to increase enrolment. The not-for-profit sector is actively responding to these needs through consultation, discussion, and research as demonstrated through the community reports released. A community-led roundtable is being planned to advance a shared understanding of international students challenges and identify opportunities for a collective response at a 2022 summit. Regional participation in the community roundtable and summit will expand understanding of the subject and could identify actions within the scope of regional responsibilities, such as advocacy.

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### **APPENDICES**

Appendix I - Designated Learning Institutions in Peel Region with Post Graduation Work Permit Programs

Appendix II - Federal International Education Strategy Overview

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