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## **Alberta should plan now to ensure future labour needs are met Immigration, more effective use of current labour pool are key**

EDMONTON – With Alberta’s economy in recovery and a return to healthy growth projected in 2020, the provincial government should be planning for how to meet future labour market needs to avoid a return to the labour shortages of the early 2000s, argues a new Parkland Institute report.

“While the recent focus has rightly been on getting Albertans back to work, we can’t forget that a few short years ago Alberta employers were wrestling with the vexing problem of how to find enough qualified workers,” explains University of Lethbridge economics professor Richard Mueller, author of *The Future of Alberta’s Labour Market*. “Demographic changes, new technologies, and shifts in the complexion of the labour market mean the solutions that have worked in the past are unlikely to work in the future. That means we need to start planning now to avoid labour supply issues arising again.”

Mueller explains that lower birth rates and a decline in interprovincial migration of workers—which historically played a significant role in filling vacancies in the province—means that immigration will play an increasingly important role in Alberta’s labour force growth in the future. Despite being primarily a federal responsibility, new programs that include greater provincial involvement mean that Alberta can have some influence on immigration to the province.

“While the media has widely reported on the rise in anti-immigration sentiments in recent years and in certain political circles, the simple economic reality is that Alberta and Canada need to attract more immigrants if we’re going to meet future labour needs,” says Mueller. “Having the right programs in place to ensure that immigrants are supported and can succeed in the changing labour market is a critical component of Alberta’s future economic health.”

Despite Alberta’s high labour force participation rates, Mueller says there are also some key opportunities to more effectively use Alberta’s current pool of labour, especially through increasing participation rates for Indigenous workers, women, and older Albertans. Improvements to credential recognition in regulated professions and skilled trades, along with bringing Alberta’s education levels up to the national average will also play an important role in ensuring qualified workers are able to fill appropriate jobs in the future.

Parkland Institute is a non-partisan public policy research institute in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta. *The Future of Alberta’s Labour Market: The Role of Immigration, Migration, and Developing Existing Human Capital* is available for [download on Parkland Institute’s website](#).

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