

Alberta at a Crossroads: Observing the Alberta Next Panel and Its Implications for Immigration

A Moment of Reflection on Immigration, Integration, and the Future of Inclusion in Alberta



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Executive Summary

In May 2025, the Government of Alberta introduced the Alberta Next Panel, a province-wide consultation initiative positioned as a roadmap for Alberta's future. While presented as a public engagement effort, the panel has prompted concern among immigrant-serving organizations, human rights advocates, and community leaders. Observers have noted that the panel's messaging and survey framing carry an "Alberta-first" tone, which may inadvertently place undue scrutiny on immigrants in relation to economic and social challenges.

Some public statements have characterized federal immigration levels as contributing to rising housing costs, strained public services, and unemployment. Proposals have even surfaced suggesting the withholding of provincial services from certain newcomers. These developments have raised questions about the broader narrative and its potential to influence public sentiment. Many fear that such framing could unintentionally foster division and diminish the province's longstanding commitment to inclusion.

Overview

The Alberta Next Panel launched its public consultation survey in July 2025, inviting residents to share perspectives on healthcare, housing, education, and immigration. While the stated goal is to gather community input, the structure and tone of the consultation have led to concerns about equity and long-term impacts on marginalized groups. Notably, the online survey section on immigration was removed in mid-August, with input now limited to in-person sessions during the Premier's tour across Alberta.

Observers have identified several emerging themes:

- A potential shift toward a two-tiered immigration system, which may deprioritize or exclude certain newcomer groups.
- Language that links population growth with social strain, potentially reinforcing xenophobic attitudes.
- Suggested reductions to essential services—such as healthcare, housing, and settlement supports—for individuals with temporary or precarious status.
- Possible tensions with federal standards and international obligations regarding refugee and migrant rights.
- A growing risk of intergovernmental friction between Alberta and Ottawa, particularly around immigration jurisdiction.

These developments could impact the work of municipalities, Service Provider Organizations (SPOs), and community initiatives that have long contributed to a more inclusive Alberta.

Immigration in Alberta: A Closer Look

Population Growth and Mobility

- Between April 2023 and April 2024, Alberta's population grew by about 204,000 people (+4.4%), the fastest growth rate among Canadian provinces.
- This expansion was driven not only by international immigration but also by significant interprovincial migration, with over 43,000 Canadians relocating from other provinces, such as Ontario and BC.

Contrary to some public claims, Alberta has not received the highest number of immigrants in Canada. In 2022, Ontario welcomed around 184,000 new permanent residents—roughly 42% of the national total—while Alberta received approximately 49,000 (11%). The proportion of immigrants in Alberta has grown steadily, reaching 23.2% in 2021, up from 17% in 2001, aligning with national trends.

Diversity and Integration

Alberta's immigrant population reflects global diversity, with top countries of origin including the Philippines, India, China, Nigeria, Pakistan, and the UK. In cities like Calgary and Edmonton, over 100 languages are spoken, and one in three residents identifies as a visible minority. Over time, immigrants have demonstrated strong integration outcomes, including high rates of home ownership and civic participation.





Pathways Forward

In light of these developments, a collective response rooted in hope, collaboration, and shared values is essential. The following recommendations offer a framework for moving forward:

Newcomers and Immigrant Communities:

Share personal stories and participate in civic dialogue to foster understanding and humanize immigration experiences. Engage in leadership and democratic processes to shape inclusive policy.

Local Politicians and Municipal Leaders:

Affirm the value of diversity and counter misinformation with data and lived experience. Ensure municipalities remain welcoming through continued support for immigrant services.

Immigrant-Serving Organizations and Advocates:

Collaborate to promote evidence-based policy, amplify newcomer voices, and lead public education efforts that dispel myths and foster empathy.

Provincial Government:

Consider reorienting consultations toward inclusive, long-term solutions that benefit all residents. Investments in housing, healthcare, and training can strengthen Alberta's future and recognize immigrants as key contributors.

Federal Government:

Enhance support for Alberta's settlement infrastructure and uphold national standards. Address misinformation through transparent data sharing and ensure provincial measures align with federal laws and human rights obligations.

Civil Society and Activists:

Mobilize across sectors—academia, business, media, and community—to promote inclusion, challenge xenophobia, and safeguard immigrant rights through education, dialogue, and legal advocacy.

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THE IMMIGRANT EDUCATION SOCIETY

Key Observations

Narrative and Misinformation

Some public discourse has linked immigration to economic challenges such as housing shortages and inflation. However, data from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and Statistics Canada suggest that Alberta's recent population growth has been largely driven by interprovincial migration and federal refugee initiatives. Housing pressures appear to stem from broader issues, including supply constraints and infrastructure gaps.



Immigrant Contributions

Immigrants continue to play a vital role in Alberta's prosperity. They fill labour shortages in critical sectors such as healthcare, elder care, construction, and technology. Their presence supports demographic growth and revitalizes both urban and rural communities. Alberta's cultural richness is deeply tied to its diverse population, with 23% of residents born outside Canada.

Panel Proposals and Potential Impacts

The Alberta Next Panel has floated ideas such as creating a provincial immigration permit and restricting access to services for those without it. If enacted, such measures could disproportionately affect refugees, asylum seekers, temporary foreign workers, and international students. Service providers caution that this approach may hinder integration and well-being, and could conflict with Charter protections and anti-discrimination laws.

Social Climate and Risks

Community organizations have reported a rise in xenophobic rhetoric, with newcomers increasingly blamed for economic difficulties. Social scientists and civic leaders warn that this trend could deepen divisions within Alberta's multicultural society, potentially eroding the province's reputation as a welcoming place.

Political Context

The Alberta Next Panel appears to be part of a broader conversation about provincial autonomy, including proposals for a pension plan, a provincial police force, and increased control over immigration. While engaging public concerns is important, there is a need to ensure that policy responses are grounded in evidence and uphold principles of equity and inclusion.

Conclusion

Alberta stands at a pivotal moment. The Alberta Next Panel has opened a conversation that, while complex, offers an opportunity to reaffirm the province's commitment to inclusion, evidence-based policy, and shared prosperity. By observing these developments with care and responding with compassion and collaboration, Alberta can continue to build a future that reflects the strength and diversity of all its people.