

The Honourable Wab Kinew
Premier of Manitoba
Email: premier@manitoba.ca (no hardcopy to follow)
CC:
Minister of Health Asagwara
Noelle Depape

Re: Proposal for a Special Immigration Pathway for Palestinian Medical Graduates from Cuba

September 18, 2025

Dear Premier Kinew,

We are writing to you with deep respect and hope to advocate for the creation of a special immigration pathway in Manitoba for medical doctor graduates of Palestinian origin who have completed their education at the prestigious Latin American School for Medicine in Cuba (ELAM is the Spanish acronym).

You may be aware that this medical school was established by Cuba in 1998 to provide free education and training for students from around the world who would not be able to afford medical education at home. It is fully accredited and recognized; the main criterion upon graduation is that the new doctors will return to their home countries to serve their communities. ELAM is one piece in the highly-regarded Cuban medical system and embodies the highest level of humanitarianism and internationalism.

These Palestinian graduates represent a highly-skilled and motivated group of professionals who are eager to contribute their expertise to Canada. They have been rigorously educated and trained, serving residency rotations in many hospital departments and sectors. ELAM graduates are recognized all over the world as compassionate, community-focused, highly-trained physicians.

There are currently about 150 Palestinian students at ELAM, with 13 from Gaza having graduated this past July 2025 after more than eight years of study and practice in Cuba. Given the dire situation in Gaza at this time, they are not able to return home like graduates from other countries. Neither can they stay and work in Cuba because they are not Cuban.

At a time when Manitoba continues to face healthcare shortages—particularly in rural and underserved communities—this initiative could provide a meaningful, practical, and timely solution for both our province and for these new doctors.

Benefits to Manitoba:

1. Addressing Physician Shortages: Manitoba's healthcare system is in urgent need of qualified professionals. These doctors can fill critical

gaps in family medicine, primary care, and other specialties.

2. Cultural Competence and Diversity: Many of these graduates speak multiple languages, including English, Spanish, and Arabic. Their cultural awareness will strengthen patient-centered care in Manitoba's increasingly diverse communities.

3. Economic and Social Contribution: By entering transitional jobs and later integrating fully into the medical workforce, these professionals will not only fill urgent labour market gaps but also contribute to Manitoba's economy and community life.

Our Commitment:

We pledge to support these medical graduates by:

-- Assisting in matching them with transitional employment opportunities in healthcare-related roles, ensuring they can begin contributing immediately while completing licensure requirements.

-- Providing or connecting them to settlement support and mentorship to help them integrate into Manitoba's healthcare and community systems.

-- Collaborating with employers and regulatory bodies to create a structured pathway that moves them from transitional roles to full medical practice.

We believe Manitoba has a unique opportunity to lead the way in designing a compassionate, practical, and innovative solution that aligns humanitarian responsibility with economic and healthcare needs. This initiative would not only help address physician shortages but would also send a strong message that Manitoba is a place where skilled immigrants can find both opportunity and belonging.

We are a group of women who have often traveled to Havana and met these young medical professionals. Despite the immense challenges they face—many of them from Gaza, carrying the heavy burden of conflict and displacement—we found them to be warm, resilient, and deeply committed to their studies. They welcomed us with kindness, shared meals, and a remarkable spirit of hospitality, even while living under very difficult financial and personal circumstances.

Most of these students spend at least eight years in Cuba: learning Spanish, completing medical school, and pursuing residency or specialty training. Despite receiving very modest stipends, they persevere with determination to succeed.

Canada has long been recognized as a country that opens its doors to refugees and vulnerable populations, yet Palestinians have often found themselves excluded from these protections. The recent shortcomings of the federal Gaza emergency program highlight a gap in our

humanitarian response. Manitoba has the chance to step forward and provide an alternative pathway of hope and opportunity for these highly-trained young doctors.

For decades, Palestinians have endured displacement and systemic barriers to resettlement. Many of these graduates cannot return home due to conflict, siege, and instability, yet remain determined to serve humanity through medicine. By welcoming them, Manitoba would not only address its own healthcare needs but also affirm its commitment to justice, compassion, and global leadership.

We are cc'ing this to Minister Asagwara's office, and also to Noelle DePape, with whom we have previously consulted on this matter. We kindly request a meeting with you or your designates to further discuss how such a program could be designed and implemented. We have already met with staff at Manitoba Start who work with doctors after they have arrived here; in the case of these Palestinian doctors in Cuba, we are looking for a way to help them get to Manitoba to begin the foreign credential recognition process. We know there are many complex requirements. We have also met with staff in MP Leah Gazan's office.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration of this urgent and hopeful proposal.

Respectfully,

Rana Abdullah, CPA
Palestinian Community Leader
Owner, Yafa Café

Emily Kozub Halldorson
Vice-President, Association of United Ukrainian Canadians Winnipeg

Diane Zack
Teacher, Winnipeg School Division
Coordinator, Manitoba-Cuba Solidarity Committee