

Welcome to Canada – here's free health care

Extra incentives should be offered to international students

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As of next April, Manitoba will start offering international students and their dependents at the high school and post-secondary levels free health care.

The new decision is “madness,” according to some groups such as the Canadian Taxpayers Association.

Colin Craig, Manitoba director of the CTF, said in an article in the Winnipeg Sun on Oct. 25 that he believes this is a big price to pay just to recruit more international students.

“Our province’s debt is going up \$50 per second and now international students get free health care?” he said. “If you’re a taxpayer and this madness annoys you, tell your friends about it.”

The aim is to encourage more international students to come to the province and eventually settle there permanently. Another motive is to reduce some of the financial burden on international students, who already pay more tuition than their Canadian counterparts.

At Concordia, a full-time international student can pay over \$7,000 per semester. This amount differs from an out-of-province student who pays \$2,919.05 and a Quebec resident who pays \$1,442.93. These examples apply to students inside the Faculty of Arts and Science. Other faculties differ in tuition prices. The tuition price is also constantly increasing, which has caused debates, objections and protests.

It’s not easy being an international student at Concordia. Having moved to Montreal two years ago, I am intrigued by Manitoba’s new decision.

Before I moved here, my friends and I would discuss where we would study and why. For some of them, Montreal was out of the question due to the financial obligations.

Health care itself costs around \$782 per year, not including dental. If free health care were provided in Montreal, international students would be more motivated to study here. Free health care wouldn’t increase their numbers dramatically, but it would be a step in the right direction.

Another important aspect to consider is age. If you are investing in free health care for high school and post-secondary students, then most of the students are

young. Therefore, the cost the province would pay for their health care is not likely to be substantial. So why not provide this service?

Another international student has similar views. "It makes sense for international students to get free health insurance because their tuition is so high," said Reem Alhosani, a third-year international business student at Concordia .

Alhosani pays about \$9,000 per semester for tuition. Her education, like mine, is financed by her parents. She believes that people who finance their own education will be more affected by the tuition prices. However, the increases are still notable in both situations.

When it comes to tuition prices, students don't have much of a choice.

"We got used to the small increases in the tuition," said Alhosani. "No one wants their tuition to increase, we don't want to pay more, but we have to."

International students who work, do internships or settle down in Quebec can be an asset to the country.

"Saskatchewan, B.C. and Newfoundland already offer free health care to international students," Tyler Blashko, vice-president advocate of the University of Winnipeg Students' Association, told the Winnipeg Sun. So why is Manitoba being dubbed mad?

The amount of money the province could generate from families who visit these students, from the tuition these students pay and from the work they would produce, should be a good incentive to offer them some extra privileges.

Instead of discouraging students from attending Canadian schools by constantly raising tuition, additional incentives should be offered to those who are already paying through the roof. The worse possible situation is to drop out halfway through your degree because you cannot afford it anymore.