# Canadian family class immigration

## The parent and grandparent component under review

by Martin Collacott

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# Contents

# Executive summary

In recent decades, sponsorship of parents and grandparents has become highly popular with immigrant communities, particularly those that come from regions that do not provide the same level of benefits for seniors as does Canada in terms of health care and social transfers.[1] Applications for such sponsorships had become so numerous that a backlog of 160,000 had accumulated by the latter part of 2010.

Not only were sponsors becoming increasingly frustrated by the delays in getting their parents and grandparents into Canada, but concerns were increasing over the cost to taxpayers of the program, which has been estimated at more than $300,000 for each senior during the course of their lifetime in Canada. In November 2011, the government responded to this situation by announcing measures that included a substantial increase in intake in the coming year in order to reduce the backlog, a new visitor visa that would allow parents and grandparents to visit their relatives in Canada for extended periods, a temporary freeze on new applications, and consultations with stakeholders and the public to determine what longer-term policy changes were needed.

In May 2013, the government unveiled its new plans. In order to reduce the backlog further it will admit another 25,000 parents and grandparents in 2013, maintain a high level of intake as well as accept 5,000 new applications in 2014, and shift more responsibility for their support to sponsors. The cap of 5,000 on new applications in 2014 represents a departure from the past when there was no limit to the number who could apply and which resulted in the large backlog.

The new measures come with a significant price tag since the 70,000 being admitted in 2012 and 2013 and planned for 2014 could cost tax payers as much as $21 billion during their lifetimes in Canada and, if all those in the backlog are eventually allowed to come here, the total bill could come to more than $40 billion.

While the government's package is designed both to assuage sponsors of parents and grandparents, particularly those in the backlog, as well as shift more responsibility for support for those sponsored in the future from taxpayers onto the shoulders of the sponsors, the program will still remain relatively costly since the public will bear most health care expenses, even in the case of new applications. How viable the package remains in the longer term remains to be seen since the government could well find itself under pressure to accept higher numbers of new applications, while at the same time public opinion may demand that sponsors who wish to have their parents and grandparents join them in Canada on a permanent basis pay all of the costs involved.

1 From 2005 to 2010 the four principal source countries were India, the People's Republic of China, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012b.)

# Introduction

Family Class immigration has long been a major element of Canada's immigration policy. Within this program, a key aspect in recent decades has been the sponsorship of parents and grandparents. After being sponsored for entry by their sons or daughters in Canada, these parents can bring with them their unmarried dependent children. The latter can then marry spouses from their country of origin, who in turn become eligible to sponsor their own parents and their parents' offspring, resulting in "chain migration." None of these sponsored immigrants are required to meet the educational, work experience, and language competency standards required of Economic Class immigrants.

The parent and grandparent program became so popular and applications so numerous that by November 2011 a backlog had accumulated of 160,000 parents and grandparents who had met the requirements. In consequence, sponsors began complaining about the long delays that could be expected before many of their parents and grandparents received visas to immigrate to Canada. The program has come under close scrutiny both because of the large and growing backlog as well as concerns over the high cost of health care incurred by such immigrants.

This study provides some historical background of issues that have surrounded Family Class immigration, assesses the current issues, and examines the new regulations put forth under Phase I and II of the federal government's *Action Plan for Faster Family Reunification*. The study concludes with an assessment of the proposed changes and recommendations for the future.

# Background to current Family Class immigration issues

Family Class immigration is composed of spouses, dependent children, and parents and grandparents sponsored by Canadian citizens and permanent residents of Canada who are 18 years of age or older.[2]

As far back as the 1950s, it became apparent that provision for the sponsorship of relatives other than the spouse and children of the primary immigrant was bringing in large numbers of people who were unskilled, often nearly illiterate, and not likely to make a positive economic contribution to Canada. By the mid-'50s, for example, it was calculated that for every individual who was admitted into Canada as an independent immigrant from one particular country another 49 gained access through sponsorship (Hawkins, 1972: 51). The government, therefore, decided to remove categories such as brothers and sisters from sponsorship eligibility.

Attempts to implement these changes, however, were met with protest from ethnic organizations, some segments of the press, and even members of the governing party. The sponsorable classes slated for removal were, accordingly, hastily restored (Hawkins, 1972: 6; and Canada, Department of Manpower and Immigration, 1974, vol. 2: 26).[3] Subsequent attempts to limit Family Class immigration were also defeated although, on occasion, when the list of relatives who were eligible for sponsorship had become particularly long, governments succeeded in reducing it somewhat.

Pressure to increase Family Class intake continued and increased over the years, particularly after Canada opened its doors to newcomers from non-traditional source countries, where economic opportunities and social welfare systems were both less developed than in the traditional source countries. In response to such pressures, the 1978 Immigration Act gave first priority to the processing of sponsored relatives, with skilled immigrants further down the pecking order.

Another point worth noting is that, while the Department of Employment and Immigration could set annual targets, the 1978 Act did not give it the power to place limits on the number of immigrants in the various components of the intake. The

2 For statistical purposes, the government includes the spouses and dependents who accompany Economic Class immigrants to Canada in the totals for the Economic Class rather than Family Class. Parents and grandparents, however, are always counted as Family Class.

3 The author presented much of the earlier historical background to Family Class immigration in a 2006 paper (Collacott, 2006).

department could not, therefore, cut off the number of Family Class applications once the annual target had been met for that group (Green and Green, 1996: 23). In effect, this meant that, if someone qualified to come here as a sponsored relative, Canada was obliged to take them, even if the processing of their visa could not be completed immediately and no matter how long the queue might become.

The reason for giving priority to sponsored relatives over skilled independent immigrants was relatively simple: immigrants already in Canada and who wanted to bring in extended family members could vote in the next election if they had become citizens, while prospective independent immigrants could not—even though they were virtually certain to be of greater economic benefit to Canada. When Freda Hawkins reported on this subject in 1972, she noted that the pressure to give preference to sponsored relatives came largely from MPs who represented ridings with large ethnic constituencies as well as lawyers who would benefit from providing advice to prospective immigrants and their sponsors (Hawkins, 1972: 349).

In terms of current policy, parents provide the key link through which extended family members can be brought into the country. After being sponsored for entry by their sons or daughters in Canada, these parents can bring with them their unmarried dependent children. The latter can then marry spouses from their country of origin, who in turn become eligible to sponsor their own parents and their parents' offspring. The resulting "chain migration" can eventually lead to the settlement in Canada of dozens of more distant relatives, none of whom has to meet the skills or language standards required of independent (Economic Class) immigrants.

**... 70 percent of the incomes of sponsored parents and grandparents came from Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement while senior Canadians in general depended on these sources for only 21 percent of their income ...**

The opportunity to sponsor parents as a means of bringing in extended family members has also significantly encouraged fraudulent applications of one sort or another. One of the most common of these is fraudulent marriages. Not many years after the 1978 legislation was passed, the 1982 Auditor General's report noted with regard to the incidence of fraudulent marriages that "engagements and marriages of convenience, even pregnancies of convenience, unverifiable or dubious family relationships, and false or altered documents are some of the methods used…" (Auditor General, 1982: section 7.44).

While the government paid little attention to marriage fraud issues for a long time, by 2010 it recognized that such marriages weakened the immigration system. In March of that year, the government declared that it was launching public consultations to ascertain the extent of public concern with the problem (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011a). One year later it announced measures designed to curb opportunities for marriage fraud. One such requirement was the imposition of a two-year waiting period after the arrival of a spouse from abroad before they would be

granted full permanent residence status (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012a). This meant, in effect, that the partners had two years to show that both were serious about continuing the union before the sponsored spouse could be granted permanent status.

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Within the Family Class, however, the sponsored parents and grandparents category has received most of the attention largely because of the cost to the public purse on the part of those who come here under this category. Since most are retired, or at least unlikely to find very remunerative employment because of their lack of qualifications, they contribute little, if any, of the income taxes required to pay for the benefits they receive. In 2008, for example, 10 years after landing, 70 percent of the income of sponsored parents and grandparents came from OAS and GIS (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012b), while senior Canadians in general depended on these sources for only 21 percent of their income (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Despite the problems associated with the parent and grandparent program, over the years its supporters have managed to broaden it and make less vulnerable to critics. In 1978, for example, its supporters succeeded in having removed the requirement that sponsored parents be at least 60 years old—thus increasing the scope for bringing in parents young enough to still have dependent children and to facilitate the chain migration of other family members not subject to the language, skills, and education requirements imposed on Economic Class immigrants.

When the current immigration legislation was tabled in 2000,[4] supporters of the program also successfully applied pressure to have the provisions for sponsoring parents transferred from the regulations (where they could be altered at the administrative level) to the Act itself, where it is much more secure and cannot be changed without recourse to Parliament. The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act also eased provisions for sponsoring family members and other relatives. It reduced the length of the sponsorship obligation from 10 years to three for spouses and common-law partners, lowered the age at which one can sponsor a relative from

4 The legislation came into force as the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act on June 28, 2002, and has been amended a number of times since then. While some of recent measures mentioned above were taken at the administrative level and did not involve amendments to the Act, the latter may be required if the government decides to make changes to the parent and grandparent program.

19 to 18, and increased the age at which a dependent son or daughter can be sponsored from 19 to 22.

One of the most notable achievements of Family Class advocates was their success in 2005 in getting the government to reverse a decision it had made to reduce the annual target for the number of parents and grandparents to be admitted. There had been around 20,000 annual arrivals in this category until 2003, which then fell to 11,000 in 2004. When a target of between 5,500 and 6,800 for 2005 was announced by then Minister of Immigration Judy Sgro, it was clear that the government's aim was to lower future intake substantially.

In one sense it was hardly surprising that the government attempted to lower admission levels in the category. As the key link to Family Class sponsorships and as a category that in itself was very costly to Canadians, it was difficult to justify the intake of such a large number of sponsored of parents and grandparents. In the face of strong opposition from groups representing immigrants, however, the government's resolve did not last long. In April 2005, the new minister of immigration, Joe Volpe, announced that the targets would be pushed back up to 18,000 for each of the next two years.

# Current issues with Family Class immigration

The most contentious aspect of Family Class immigration in recent years has been the sponsorship of parents and grandparents. Not only has a massive backlog built up of applications for entry under this category, but estimates of the cost to Canadian taxpayers—particularly for the health care services provided to parents and grandparents—have raised serious questions about the extent to which existing taxpayers should be expected to underwrite such sponsorships.

Major backlogs had built up in other categories as well, such as for skilled immigrants (the largest component of the Economic Class) because every year far more people were applying and meeting the requirements than the government was prepared to admit into the country. In the case of sponsored parents and grandparents, a senior government official estimated before a Parliamentary committee on November 17, 2011, that, while the government had been aiming at admitting between 15,000 and 18,000, about 35,000 to 40,000 were joining the queue every year (Parliament of Canada, 2011a).

Those sponsoring their parents and grandparents have become particularly concerned since the government estimated the wait for those backlogged in this category in November 2011 at close to seven years (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012b)[5]—a length of time that could mean many might be too old to travel safely or perhaps even die before receiving their visas. The aforementioned senior official, moreover, also told the Parliamentary committee that, at the rate at which applications were being submitted and at current admission levels, by 2020 the backlog of parents and grandparents would be close to half a million and the wait time probably more than 15 years (Parliament of Canada, 2011a).

In the case of parents and grandparents not only has there been increasing frustration among sponsors over the lengthening wait time, but also greater public awareness and concern over the high costs associated with the program. With regard to the latter, the government made an estimate of the costs to the health care system of sponsored seniors (i.e., parents and grandparents over the age of 65) in a memorandum from the Deputy Minister Citizenship and Immigration Canada to the Minister in

5 The Citizenship and Immigration Canada backgrounder, *Stakeholder Consultations on a Redesigned Parent and Grandparent Program,* contains a good deal of useful information on both problems with the current system and possible solutions (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012b).

September 2011—the text of the memorandum was obtained through an Access to Information request and essential details made available to the public in a Vancouver Sun article (Cohen, 2012).

The government memorandum estimated that in 2010 there were 275,000 senior (i.e., older than age 65) sponsored parents and grandparents in Canada and that their balance-of-life health care costs were $27 billion (Access to Information request by author to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011c: 3). The estimates did not include the health costs of those younger than 65, which means that the total cost for all parents and grandparents will be somewhat higher since the average age of those who arrived in 2010, for example, was 57, and of the total of 15,324 who arrived in that year, only 5,655 were aged 65 years or older.

**According to the government's calculations, the annual health care costs of the estimated 275,000 senior sponsored parents living in Canada in 2010 came to nearly $3 billion a year, and the total cost for a newcomer senior was estimated at $160,000 based on an assumed life expectancy of 85 years. It was also assumed that a large portion of the burden of these costs would fall directly on the public purse ...**

On the other side of the ledger, the total cost could also be somewhat lower since the government's estimate assumed life expectancy of 85 years for all sponsored immigrants and did not take into account possible migration out of the country. If figures for the latter were available and were factored in, a further adjustment would still have to be made to the health costs since some of those who move abroad might return to Canada for major medical procedures.

According to the government's calculations, the annual health care costs of the estimated 275,000 senior sponsored parents living in Canada in 2010 came to nearly $3 billion a year, and the total cost for a newcomer senior was estimated at $160,000 based on an assumed life expectancy of 85 years. It was also assumed that a large portion of the burden of these costs would fall directly on the public purse since none of these seniors earned enough to pay significant income taxes.[6]

The government's estimates were based on data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (2010) on life expectancies and average health care costs for the different age groups in the general Canadian population. Data were not available specifically for sponsored parents and grandparents, however, and the government's estimates for these were based on the assumption that their life expectancies and health care costs were the same as for Canadians in general.

An alternative estimate of the cost of health care for sponsored parents and grandparents was provided by economist Patrick Grady, who concluded that the aver-

6 According to a study by Citizenship and Immigration Canada of data collected between 1980 and 2000 and cited in the government's document, where parents and grandparents were aged 50 years or older when they landed, no one ever reported employment earnings greater than $15,000 per year.

age health care costs for someone between the ages of 65 and 85 were $192,500 (Grady, 2012: Table 2) based on data from a 2011 CD Howe Institute study (Dodge and Dion, 2011: 6).

In addition, Grady calculated that senior sponsored parents and grandparents received, on average, $6,262.24 in Old Age Security (OAS) and Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) payments plus $1,381.30 in other government transfers for a total of $7,644 a year (Grady, 2012). This would amount to $152,880 for someone who lived in Canada from the age of 65 to 85.

If we combine the government's estimate of $160,000 in health care costs for sponsored seniors with Grady's calculation of the cost of the other benefits they receive, the total for senior sponsored parents and grandparents over the 20-year period comes to $312,880.

It is important to note that these estimated costs are gross and do not include the total taxes (income, sales, business, property, etc.) paid by senior sponsored parents and grandparents. By the same token, the estimates do not take into account other benefits they receive from government goods, services, and transfers. Given that average total income for elderly recent immigrants is estimated at $15,696, that these immigrants received average annual government transfers of $7,644, and that the annual per capita cost of health care for those over 65 is estimated at roughly $9,600, it is highly unlikely that senior sponsored parents and grandparents pay enough in taxes to cover the costs of these programs.[7] As such, it is clear that the parent and grandparent program comes at a substantial cost to Canadians and is putting a strain on our already beleaguered health care and pension systems.

7 The data presented here are from Grady, 2012.

# Arguments made in support of current sponsorship provisions

One argument that has been advanced in support of the parent and grandparent program is that many of its sponsors come from cultural backgrounds where it is traditional for extended and multigenerational families to live under one roof. While such a tradition may have been the case in some immigrants' countries of origin in the past, there are indications that it is becoming less so today. An Indian government survey released in 2011, for example, showed that in a city such as Delhi, more than 90 percent of people were living in western-style nuclear families (Nelson, 2011). If, therefore, households in India—especially in the large urban centres from which many of our most qualified Indian immigrants come—are increasingly less likely to choose to live with their parents and grandparents, it has to be asked whether such a tradition needs to be accorded importance in the shaping of Canadian immigration policy.

A further point that has been made in support of bringing in parents and grandparents is that many potential immigrants who are highly skilled and likely to contribute to our economy may not be interested in coming here if they cannot be accompanied by their parents and siblings. While being able to bring in one's parents and grandparents may be an added bonus for some newcomers, it seems unlikely that very many who believe it is to their advantage to immigrate to Canada will decline to do so because they cannot sponsor such relatives.

What is quite clear is that the parent and grandparent program is very expensive for Canadians. Notwithstanding the financial benefits young working immigrant couples with children enjoy by having parents and grandparents with them to help out as caregivers,[8] it is difficult to justify such an arrangement if it costs taxpayers $160,000 in health care costs alone during the lifetime of such a caregiver in Canada.

While having sponsored parents and grandparents available for child care may reduce the burden on government-funded facilities and may also enable greater labour force participation by the sponsors, it seems unlikely that such benefits would come close to offsetting the health care and other costs to taxpayers of those sponsored.

8 The value of parents and grandparents as caregivers for the sponsor's children has often been cited as a major argument in support of the parent and grandparent program. An example of this can be found in a paper by Ontario Liberal Member of Parliament Andrew Telegdi, who argues that, because of the benefits to sponsors, the quota for this category must be increased and their applications expedited (Telegdi, 2006).

# Public support for changing Family Class immigration

With respect to Family Class immigration, there is growing support among the general public for a tightening of the rules. For example, in the summer of 2011, Citizenship and Immigration Canada held in-person and online consultations with stakeholders and the public in which almost half of the respondents said they did not believe it was important to maintain the parents and grandparents category and 60 percent said they did not believe parents and grandparents should be given the same application processing priority as spouses, partners, and children (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012b). A recent poll, moreover, revealed that, while Canadians agreed by a margin of almost six to one that immigrants should be allowed to bring their spouses and dependent children with them, when asked whether extended family members such as parents and grandparents should also be allowed to accompany them, respondents registered their opposition by a margin of two-and-a-half to one (Forum Research, 2013).

**While Canadians support allowing immigrants to bring with them their spouses and dependent children by a margin of almost six to one, they are against allowing them to bring in extended family members such as parents and grandparents by a margin of two-and-a-half to one.**

Another indication that support has been waning for subsidizing the cost of parents and grandparents was in fact evident even before the current debate began in earnest in 2010. In 2009, a Toronto area Liberal MP, Ruby Dhalla, tabled a private member's bill that would reduce the wait time to become eligible to receive Old Age Security from 10 to three years for parents and grandparents from countries that do not have reciprocal pension agreements with Canada.[9]

Although the bill was seconded by prominent Liberal MP Bob Rae, it was opposed by the Liberal pension critic, Judy Sgro, who pointed out that it would cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars, and by most other Liberal MPs, who realized it would not be popular with the general public. In the end, Dhalla's bill did not even get as far as first reading in Parliament.

9 Canada has reciprocal pension agreements with countries that collect taxes from their citizens during their working lives to pay for income support after they retire. Parents and grandparents from such countries are eligible to receive OAS after three years of residency in Canada. Parents and grandparents from countries that do not have reciprocal agreements with Canada, in contrast, must wait 10 years before receiving OAS.

# Proposed new regulations

Given the issues with family class immigration and growing support for change, then Immigration Minister Jason Kenney announced on November 4, 2011, Phase I of the Action Plan for Faster Family Reunification, a four-part program dealing with the sponsored parents and grandparents waiting in the backlog and future applications (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011b).

One element of the announcement was that there would be a pause of up to 24 months in the acceptance of new sponsorship applications for parents and grandparents beginning November 5, 2011. Another element was that the government would consult Canadians on how to redesign the program to ensure its sustainability in the future, to avoid future large backlogs, and to be sensitive to fiscal constraints.

Along with these two measures temporarily restricting new applications and presaging changes that could limit intake in the future, the government also announced two initiatives to assuage those in the backlog as well as offer alternative arrangements for family reunification that did not involve bringing in parents and grandparents on a permanent basis. The first was to increase the number admitted from just over 15,000 in 2010 to 25,000 in 2012 (and later announcing that the target for 2013 would also be 25,000). The second was to introduce a parent and grandparent "Super Visa" that would be valid for 10 years and allow parents and grandparents to visit Canada for up to 24 months at a time.

The latter measure allows parents and grandparents to spend extended periods of time with their offspring in Canada while at the same time eliminating the cost to taxpayers since sponsors have to provide full support while the parents and grandparents are here as well as take out medical insurance to cover their health care costs.

In May 2013, the government announced further measures for dealing with the backlog as well as managing future sponsorship applications in a more effective manner. Specifically, its intention to implement the provisions of Phase II of the Action Plan for Faster Family Reunification (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013a) included the following[10]:

- In 2012 and 2013, Canada will admit 50,000 parents and grandparents as permanent residents. This represents the highest level of parents and grandparents admitted in 20 years. In 2014, Canada will maintain high levels of admissions for parents and grandparents.

10 Further background on Phase II as well as the text of the proposed new regulations are available on the Canada Gazette website (Canada Gazette, 2013).

- The Super Visa will become permanent and will continue to provide flexibility for families who use the 10-year multiple-entry visa, allowing visa holders to remain in Canada up to two years at a time. Over 15,000 Super Visas have been issued since the program's launch in December 2011 with approval rates averaging 86 percent.

- New qualifying criteria for permanent residency sponsorship of parents and grandparents will increase the financial responsibility of sponsors to ensure they have the means to support those they sponsor. These criteria include: 1) extending the sponsorship support period from 10 years to 20 years since there has been a marked tendency on the part of those sponsored to seek welfare as soon as the current 10 period for support by the sponsor is up; 2) add 30% to the Minimum Necessary Income (MNI) required of sponsors since it has been found that the existing MNI requirement is frequently not sufficient to ensure adequate support of parents and grandparents in addition to the sponsor's immediate family; 3) lengthen from one year to three years the period for which the sponsor must demonstrate they have sufficient income in order to prevent cases where a sponsorship is allowed on the basis of a single year of high earnings that does not reflect the sponsor's true financial situation; 4) limit evidence of the sponsor's income to documents issued by the Canada Revenue Agency since many of those accepted until now have proven to be unreliable; 5) give immigration officers who are processing sponsorship applications the authority to ask for updated documentation of the sponsor's earnings in cases where at least a year has elapsed between the time the application is received and when a decision on it is made in order to ensure that the earnings are still sufficient; and 6) change the definition of dependent children to reduce the age limit to under 19 and remove the exception for full-time students.

**New qualifying criteria for permanent residency sponsorship of parents and grandparents will increase the financial responsibility of sponsors to ensure they have the means to support those they sponsor.**

5,000 new sponsorship applications will be accepted in 2014 under the new proposed regulations. This will mark a change from the past when, until 2011, there was no limit on how many could apply and which resulted in the accumulation of 160,000 applications in the backlog.

# Assessment of the proposed regulations

It is interesting that the government has chosen to deal with the backlog of skilled immigrants (Economic Class) and Family Class immigrants differently. For instance, the government chose to reduce the backlog of skilled workers by cancelling the applications of those who had applied under the old standards, refunding their application fees, and allowing them to reapply under the new (and higher) standards. In contrast, in the case of sponsored parents and grandparents, it has chosen to admit a major proportion of those in the backlog on the basis of the standards in place when their applications for admission were originally made. While the reason for this difference in approach has not been made clear, a likely consideration is that, as mentioned earlier in this paper, sponsors of parents and grandparents are usually eligible to vote in the next election while skilled immigrants do not have sponsors able to influence the outcome of elections in Canada.

With 50,000 of the sponsored parents and grandparents from the backlog being admitted in 2012 and 2013 and another 20,000 planned for admission in 2014 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013b), the estimated cost to tax payers will be substantial. Based on estimated costs of over $300,000 each during the course of their lifetimes in Canada, the total cost of these 70,000 parents and grandparents will be in the neighborhood of $21 billion. While the government estimates that this will reduce the queue to half of what it was in 2011, if those remaining in the backlog are eventually admitted, the cost to tax payers could rise to more than $40 billion, over half of which would come from health care programs.

As mentioned above, the Super Visa will become permanent under Phase II. The apparent success of the Super Visa has been reflected in the fact that Australia recently followed our example by introducing a somewhat similar program under which parents and grandparents could obtain a visa valid for up to five years, good for individual visits of 12 months, and for which sponsors had to provide medical insurance as well as support (Australia, 2013a). The Canadian government should continue to promote the Super Visa program both because of its benefits for immigrant communities and because of its probable effect of reducing pressures to increase sponsorship of parents and grandparents to come here permanently.

The third provision put forth in Phase II (i.e., the requirement to ensure that sponsors have sufficient resources to support their parents and grandparents and

accompanying dependents after they arrive in Canada) makes good economic sense and will reduce the burden on Canadian taxpayers.

A major effort, however, will be required to ensure that sponsors do, in fact, provide the support to which they have committed. One of the problems with the undertakings required up to the present (and which, of course, have been for a shorter time than will be the case in the future), is that sponsors have often failed to fulfill their obligations and taxpayers were left to fill the gap.

The proposal to change the definition of dependent children to reduce the age limit to under 19 and remove the exception for full-time students also makes sense. As long ago as 1982 the Auditor General of Canada had identified the phenomenon of "courier parents" who, after being sponsored as immigrants to Canada, brought their children with them as their dependents and then returned to their country of origin while leaving their children in Canada (Report of the Auditor General of Canada, 1982: section 7.45). In such cases the sponsorship of the parents was clearly for the purpose of bringing in their children on a permanent basis without the latter having to meet the standards required of skilled (i.e., independent) immigrants (Collacott, 2002: 22).

**... the government may wish to consider in the future the introduction of the Balance of Family Test employed by Australia for almost two decades to regulate and rationalize the settlement of sponsored parents and grandparents in that country. This requires that, in order for someone to sponsor their parents, at least half of their siblings have to be already living permanently in Australia ...**

While the proposed changes in the definition of dependent children constitute a move in the right direction, the government may wish to consider in the future the introduction of the Balance of Family Test employed by Australia for almost two decades to regulate and rationalize the settlement of sponsored parents and grandparents in that country. This requires that, in order for someone to sponsor their parents, at least half of their siblings have to be already living permanently in Australia, or at least more of them living permanently in Australia than in any other country (Australia, 2013b). The rationale for this requirement is that, since the justification for bring in one's parents is family reunification, it doesn't make much sense for them to come if more members of their family live elsewhere than in Australia.

This requirement has led to very different results from those ensuing from Canada's parent and grandparent program. In our case, someone can nominate their parents even if all of their siblings live in other countries. Once the Balance of Family Test was introduced in Australia, fewer parents qualified for sponsorship than in the past, and fewer siblings accompanied them as dependents since most had to be permanent residents in Australia already in order for the parents to be eligible to be sponsored in the first place.

Lastly, under Phase II, the plan to begin accepting new applications again in 2014 confirms the government's commitment to maintaining a program for the sponsorship of parents and grandparents. While it intends to raise the requirements for sponsorship, those fortunate enough to have one of the 5,000 sponsorship applications that are accepted will, nevertheless, be able to benefit from what will still be a very generous program. Although the proposed new guidelines should to a considerable extent reduce the fiscal transfers to those sponsored, the costs the latter incur on the public health care system will remain. And these are not inconsiderable. As indicated above, they are estimated to be at least $160,000 for each of those sponsored during their lifetime in Canada.

In comparison, it is worth noting that most sponsored parents and grandparents who settle in Australia are admitted under a program that involves a substantial financial outlay. To obtain a Contributory Parent visa, sponsors must pay a total of AU$46,286 in visa fees in addition to posting a financial bond and an assurance of support (Australia, 2013c). Even payments of this magnitude probably fall far short of the cost of the public health care services that each of the arrivals is likely to receive during their lifetime in Australia. In the circumstances, it remains difficult to justify the expenditure of hundreds of thousands of dollars on health care for elderly immigrants who have made little or no contribution to the tax base that pays for such services.

# Recommendations and conclusions

The Canadian government has taken a year-and-a-half to draw up measures to deal with the large backlog of sponsored parents and grandparents waiting to enter Canada and to develop proposals for reorganizing the program so that it still provides for such sponsorships in the future, but without placing such a heavy fiscal burden on Canadian taxpayers. The elements of the package of measures announced by the Minister of Immigration on May 10, 2013, partly address both of these issues.

In the case of the backlog, the government has chosen to allow a major proportion of those in the queue to come here despite the heavy costs this will incur on taxpayers and the additional pressure their presence here will place on the health care system. The public should be aware of the extent of these costs, particularly since there may well be renewed pressure in the future to increase the numbers admitted and, if so, there should be no illusions about the costs involved.

The proposals to strengthen sponsorship requirements make good sense because they will reduce the likelihood that those coming here will rely heavily on social assistance for income support. Costs to the health care system will, however, still be very considerable. Changes to the rules applying to children accompanying sponsored parents and grandparents as their dependents are also an improvement, although could be made better by introducing provisions along the lines of the Australian Balance of Family Test.

The government has indicated that under the proposed new measures the number of new applications for sponsored parents and grandparents accepted in 2014 will be limited to 5,000. While it has not indicated how many new applications will be accepted after 2014, it seems reasonable to assume that it has no plans to raise the number accepted annually to more than 5,000 given the continuing high cost of the program to taxpayers, particularly in the area of health care services.

The still very generous provisions of the program, however, may well result in demands to increase the numbers allowed to come here.[11] The price for increasing the numbers could well be a requirement that these costs be shifted entirely from taxpay-

11 An indication of possible future attempts at the political level to ease provisions for sponsoring parents and grandparents, as well possibly to push for increased numbers, came in an address to an audience of Indo-Canadian voters in the Vancouver suburb of Surrey on July 24, 2013, by the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, Justin Trudeau. He is reported to have declared that, were he to become prime minister, his government would reverse the Tory crackdown on Family Class immigration and that "Liberals understand how we bring over parents and grandparents is how we build strong communities and a stronger Canada" (Gunter, 2013).

ers to sponsors if public acceptance of the parent and grandparent program is to be maintained.

In terms of specific measures to reduce the cost to the public, one approach would be to require that sponsors take out comprehensive medical insurance, as is now required for Super Visa visitor applications, and commit themselves to providing whatever income support will be required. As Patrick Grady has pointed out, however, simply requiring that sponsors accept personal responsibility for the support and health care of their parents and grandparents may not be enough, given the problems governments have encountered in trying to recover costs from sponsors who have been unable or unwilling to carry out their undertakings of support (Grady, 2012: 11).

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If annual levels for new applications are indeed raised above 5,000, considerably more attention will have to be given to working out the mechanisms by which taxpayers will be adequately protected from having to assume the costs of support and medical care associated with parents and grandparents if, for one reason or another, sponsors fail to do so.

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# About the author

**Martin Collacott** served for more than 30 years with Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. In the first part of his Foreign Service career he was assigned to the International Control Commission in Indochina, Hong Kong, Beijing, Lagos, and Tokyo. During this period he also served as the Chinese-speaking member of the Canadian team that negotiated the establishment of diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China in 1970. Later he was High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, and Ambassador to Syria, Lebanon, and Cambodia, and at departmental headquarters in Ottawa as Director for Latin American Relations and as Director General for Security Services.

His interest in immigration goes back to his service with the Ontario Department of Education where he was responsible for government support services, including teacher training and citizenship classes for newcomers throughout the province. Subsequent to this, and prior to entering the Foreign Service, he spent five years in North Borneo as a CIDA advisor training teachers in Chinese schools to teach English as a second language. He also has a personal interest in immigration in that both his parents are immigrants (from the UK), as is his wife (from Vietnam).

Following his retirement from government service he took part in projects in Asia involving conflict resolution, human rights, and governance, and was chief observer for Canada at the Cambodian national elections in 1998. In recent years he has concentrated on reforms to Canadian immigration and refugee policy and has written and spoken extensively on these topics as well as testified before Parliamentary and Congressional committees in Ottawa and Washington.

He is currently a Senior Fellow at the Fraser Institute in Vancouver as well as spokesperson, member of the Board of Directors, and Chair of the Advisory Board of the Centre for Immigration Policy Reform.

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