

7. NAFTA and Other Work Permits

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The North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA (now CUSMA), created a “low-barrier” approach to getting a “TN” visa. Those visas are a particularly popular ways to allow people to work temporarily in Canada. Non-CUSMA work permits also exist, for things like transfers or US hiring by Canadian employers.

All allow you to apply for permanent residence, but...

7.1 Contradictio in Terminis

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/mandate/corporate-initiatives/levels/supplementary-immigration-levels-2026-2028.html>

... to *get* any of these temporary work permits, you are expected to demonstrate you're planning on returning to the US. The idea is to allow US citizens to work in Canada without affecting Canadian employment levels. That means you must have “temporary intent”, or you'd be turned away for “stealing Canadian jobs”.

Contradictorily, if someone has “established strong roots in their communities, are paying taxes and are helping to build the strong economy Canada needs”, then we'll be inviting you to stay. For 2026 and 2027, the government will “accelerate the transition of up to 33,000 temporary workers to permanent residency”. If you're an attractive immigrant who originally *didn't* want to stay, we'd *like* you to stay.

In short, if you apply for any of these temporary permits, you *need* to demonstrate you have strong ties to the US and will return there. You can change your mind ... later.

7.2 CUSMA (formerly NAFTA)

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/temporary-residents/foreign-workers/international-free-trade-agreements/cusma.html>

This is the “TN” visa you’ve probably heard about.

It’s good, but it’s also under “negotiation” by untrusted parties. TN visas *to the US* may well be squeezed or dropped circa July 2026. Following on from that, Canada will have to decide if it wants to limit or phase them out as well, probably driven by whether we see job losses in Canada.

CUSMA visas are good because they’re easy to get if you have a degree. Your employer doesn’t have to prove they haven’t found a Canadian for the job.

CUSMA offers distinct work categories for professionals, intra-company transferees and others. Each category has unique criteria.

Some examples of the professional or “specialized knowledge” categories are accountants, engineers, computer systems analysts, lawyers, architects and management consultants. The complete lists (there are two) are at

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/work-canada/special-instructions/business-people.html>

A **professional** from one of those two lists must have

- a job offer,
- a minimum education, usually a bachelor’s degree in their field, and
- licensing where required. For example, nursing and teaching require you have a license.

An **Intra-Company Transferee** needs

- to be a US citizen, and
- be employed at a US firm which has a legitimate branch, affiliate, or subsidiary in Canada.

They need to be in a “specialized knowledge” or management job from the lists. Finally, they need to have worked for the US company for over a year.

Either of these will count as “Canadian experience” when you apply for permanent residency. You’ll fall into at least the *Federal Skilled Worker, Canadian Experience* class.

Resources

- immigration-nation.ca, [Moving to Canada as an American: CUSMA \(Formerly NAFTA\) Work Permits & LMIA Exemptions](#)
- CUSMA hints, <https://www.calverimmigrationservices.com/post/navigating-work-permits-for-professionals-under-cusma-your-guide-to-working-in-canada>
- Compass (charitable organization) on CUSMA, <https://www.compassimmigration.ca/blog/how-to-immigrate-to-canada-from-the-us-cusma>
- List of professions, <https://www.canadavisa.com/nafta-professionals.html>

- canadavisa.com discussion group, <https://www.canadavisa.com/canada-immigration-discussion-board/>

7.3 LMIA's

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/work-canada/hire-temporary-foreign.html>

They are pronounced “lamia”, but they’re not the ancient Greek snake-womanⁱ who devours young men.

Instead a Labor Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) looks to see if there is a need for a foreign worker for a particular job. It’s a hurdle, not a snake. The idea is to see if there are no qualified Canadian citizens or permanent residents who will do it.

The assessment is requested by the employer via Service Canada. The employer will be required to post the job on the Government of Canada Job Bank, <https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/home> and advertised nationally in at least two ways, for 30 days.



<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/foreign-workers/median-wage/high/requirements.html>

There are a number of categories where a LMIA is not required.

These are typically for jobs that Canada already knows it wants to be filled. An example is the *Francophone Mobility* work permit, which doesn’t require an LMIA you intend to live and work outside Quebec.

These are announced by the Prime Minister irregularly, when there is a clear need. In February, 2026, the PM announced one for persons who want to become a member of the Canadian Forces.

The current non-lamia set includes at least

- health care and social services workers, such as nurse practitioners, dentists, pharmacists, psychologists and chiropractors,
- trades, such as carpenters, plumbers and machinists,
- foreign-trained doctors with Canadian work experience, added in December 2025,
- the francophone mobility category, and
- the new Canadian Forces category, from February 2026.

Knowing which of these program to apply to usually requires expert advice.

Resources

- Immigrating to Canada: Does Canada Need More of My Profession? 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8gya6dqDCT0>

7.4 Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP)

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/foreign-workers.html>

This is the ordinary foreign worker program, usually known for the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), that Canada offers to people from Mexico and the Caribbean.

However, it's far wider than that. It includes both low-wage and high-wage jobs. The programs are

- the Federal Skilled Worker Program (FSWP) and
- the Canadian Experience Class (CEC), both of which are non-seasonal, and
- the Federal Skilled Trades Program (FSTP), which can be seasonal work.

All provide employer-specific work permits based on a job offer. Employers normally require an LMIA, unless there is a high need. For example, foreign physicians coming to work in Quebec don't need a LMIA. There is a list of these jobs [here](#).

There is even an option for an employer hire a skilled worker in support of an [application for permanent residency](#), if they expect to need the person forever. Yes, that's contradictory.

7.5 Open Work Permit

There are also two other forms of work permit. The first we've already seen in Chapter 2, the Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP).

The other is an open work permit, that allows the person to work for any Canadian employer. These are only available for certain groups, such as spouses of skilled workers, international students, or those in the process of transitioning to permanent residency, but they avoid the need for an employer to work through a LMIA.

Caution! There is a false claim that Canada was considering shutting down open work permits. Not so: <https://toronto.citynews.ca/2026/02/02/ircc-refutes-reports-that-canadas-open-work-permit-programs-are-ending-this-2026/>

7.6 Work Transfers to Canada

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/work-canada/special-instructions/business-people.html> under *Intra-company transferees*

Canada has some special cases in NAFTA that line up with the International Mobility Program (IMP). One includes employees moving within the same company to a Canadian office, or starting a Canadian office. This isn't as easy as being a digital nomad, but allows you to live and work for your employer in Canada without being remote, and for one to three year periods, renewable for up to five years.

I worked in Minneapolis under the US version of this, which was then called a "white card".

There is no requirement for a Lamia, and time spent counts toward “Canadian experience” in an application for permanent residence.

Resources

- <https://www.cicnews.com/2026/01/these-us-workers-have-an-advantage-in-moving-to-canada-0166211.html>
- <https://immigration.ca/intra-company-transferees/>
- <https://www.canadavisa.com/intra-company-transfer-program.html>
- <https://motivus.law/canadian-immigration/intra-company-transfers>
- <https://www.ackahlaw.com/services/canada-work-visas/intra-company-job-transfers>

7.8 Canada’s Healthcare Infusions

<https://engageq.notion.site/infusionhosts>

This initiative, mentioned in Chapter 1, is a grass-roots campaign to get more healthcare workers to move here.

We have a shortage of doctors, nurses and other healthcare workers, so Tod and Jocelyn Maffin started a volunteer migration-support group. They started in Nanaimo, BC and it has spread across all of Canada.

They have a map of the groups across Canada at that site, each of which has expertise in the worker needs of the area.

Resources

Notably, there is a collection of YouTube talks by Tod Maffin:

- Find safety in Canada, 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6HOJyoHrpo>
- U.S. Nurses Begin Arriving in Nanaimo, 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTtbHcmD0WM>
- The Nanaimo Infusion – We're Doing It Again! 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J8no3Bscpno>
- Moving to Canada as a Doctor or Healthcare Worker, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryTdNBC9mn8>
- U.S. Healthcare Workers: Want to Work in Canada? Watch This First! 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ACEPjGYJfg>

The Nova Scotia chapter has been in the news lately,

- A no-brainer: Why some U.S. health-care workers are moving to Nova Scotia”, at <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/american-healthcare-workers-moving-nova-scotia-9.7025866>
- <https://novascotiahealthcareinfusion.notion.site/Nova-Scotia-Healthcare-Infusion-297e74c53bba81a4b908cd47106894a6>

Doctors

It's harder to move to Canada as a doctor, but we've recently improved this. People certified by the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS), the American Board of Family Medicine (ABFM), or the American Osteopathic Association (AOA), probably don't need to take the qualifying exam.

Once you're here, provinces offering full licenses are British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. In other words, everywhere except Ontario, Quebec, and the territories. If you don't have those qualifications, you can work as a kind or an apprentice for 12 weeks and have your supervisor approve you.

<https://moving2canada.com/features/how-to-work-in-canada-as-a-doctor/>

7.8 For All of These

Immigration *publishes* the criteria that immigration officers use, to avoid blind-siding applicants. Of course, it's written in bureaucratese, or perhaps parseltongue.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/temporary-residents/foreign-workers/international-free-trade-agreements/general-agreement-trade-services.html>

To determine eligibility, officers should consider the following factors:

- *the intentions of the applicant*
 - *What is the applicant doing in Canada?*
 - *How long has the applicant been here?*
 - *How long is the request for?*
- *the reason given by the applicant for applying for the extension*
 - *Are the plans well thought out or merely frivolous?*
 - *Has the applicant previously received an extension?*
- *the applicant's situation in their home country*
 - *What family, employment or other responsibilities and obligations has the person left behind?*
 - *How have these responsibilities been discharged?*
 - *Is a prolonged stay in Canada reasonable and feasible?*
- *the initial intent of the application*
 - *What was the original purpose of the business visit to Canada?*
 - *Has the original purpose of the business visit been fulfilled?*
 - *If the original purpose of the business visit has not been fulfilled, was sufficient time originally granted to fulfill the purpose?*

- *the necessary license or documentation to practice the applicant's occupation in Canada in instances where an occupation is regulated at a provincial or territorial level. For example, in most provinces and territories, electrician and plumber are regulated occupations and require documentation to be practiced.*

Resources

- A light-hearted Todd Maffin video on moving to Canada as a skilled worker, “11 Things Americans Must Know Before Moving to Canada”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnux5kWrVPs>
- Information about background checks for jobs, https://moving2canada.com/features/background-checks-for-jobs-in-canada-what-to-expect/?utm_source=news.moving2canada.com&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_campaign=resources-for-newcomers-march-1-2026
- About reference checks, <https://moving2canada.com/features/reference-checks-in-canada-prepare-your-referees/>

7.9 Green Card Holders in the US

Canada *may* be getting ready to relaunch its fast-track work permit for U.S. H-1B visa holders. Last year's took two days for 10,000 applicants to apply for three-year open work permits. The popularity may have something to do with the US \$100,000 fee for new H-1B visas.

- <https://moving2canada.com/features/canada-h1b-work-permit-how-to-prepare/>

This is a live document. These links will change. Always refer to the government pages for current rules. And please file an issue at <https://codeberg.org/tokugawa-behr/Fleeing-to-Canada/issues> so I'll know what needs updating.

In Short

It's perfectly possible to get a job in Canada and get a work permit, if the employer agrees. That doesn't make it particularly easy, but some support groups *strongly* want you to succeed.

i Deivid.ai, Sketch of a Lamia", AI-generated image, 2026.