After years of alleged discrimination by health regulatory authorities in Manitoba, some graduates of international medical schools living in the province may finally get the opportunity to practise here.

Health minister Dave Chomiak announced recently that a new program will help international medical graduates obtain licensure in Manitoba. “We know there are international medical graduates in the province who can use their training and skills to benefit Manitobans,” says Chomiak.

The 3-stage program will be administered by Manitoba Health, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba and the University of Manitoba medical school. The first stage, which is optional, will help candidates improve their language skills and provide them with information on legal and ethical issues related to medical practice in Canada. The second stage includes a 3-day assessment and professional enhancement process that will identify applicants who may be eligible to apply for immediate registration. For those requiring further training, a 1-year program aimed at physicians’ individual needs will be offered by the medical school.

Eligible candidates will be granted conditional licences and will begin primary care practice in their sponsoring region, where they will work with a practice adviser who is a licensed MD.

The province and regional health authorities will provide more than $600 000 in the first year for program development. The yearly budget of $1 million will provide 10 spots annually; international graduates will pay $10 000 to $13 000 each for assessment and licensing.

Pauline Morris, coordinator of the Association of Foreign Medical Graduates in Manitoba Inc., said the program is long overdue. “I know of many intelligent, qualified international medical graduates who left Manitoba because they were not allowed to practise in this province. Their departure was a real loss to the province.” She estimates that about 50 international graduates will be eligible for the Manitoba program.

Norma Loewen, who trained to be a doctor in the Philippines, has worked as a day-care worker since moving to Canada. “This program is wonderful news,” said Loewen, who plans to apply. — David Square, Winnipeg