

For our **future**

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION: KEY TO CANADA'S RECOVERY

University and college staff reacted quickly to the public health emergency, moving over two million students off-campus. Academic staff have made extraordinary efforts to ensure continuity of education through remote emergency teaching, many while juggling family responsibilities.

The costs of this rapid transition and the foregone revenue have created concerns over income shortfalls. It also amplified long-standing problems in the sector, such as the erosion of public funding, a large precarious and underemployed workforce, rising tuition and student debt, the reliance on exploitative international student fees and weak collegial governance.

Universities and colleges are critical to the COVID-19 response and recovery, providing much needed research, knowledge, education and training. Yet, across the country, provincial funding for post-secondary education is strained. Already, we are seeing lay-offs, hiring freezes and tuition increases, just when students and their families can least afford it.

A recent survey of new and returning college and university students showed that up to a third were reconsidering their plans for school in the fall. Worried about both the experience of remote emergency learning as well as the costs, students may choose to defer their plans of education – or be faced with taking on more debt to finance their education. Seventy per cent of students highlighted that their plans for summer employment were disrupted by COVID-19. Many students were aware of emergency federal supports, and although it would help students throughout the summer, it would have limited impact on students' ability to pay for school in the fall.

We need the federal government to make sure that any Canadian that wants to start or go back to school this fall is able to afford it, and is able to do so without taking on even more debt.

And we need a federal government to work with the provinces to fix the broken funding model for post-secondary education to ensure that post-secondary education is able to focus on what it does best – bring the research, knowledge, education and training to help drive the recovery and shape a better, more resilient Canada.

50%

of students say COVID-19 has made it more difficult to afford post-secondary education.



30%

of students are reconsidering their plans to attend university or college in the fall.

ACTIONS NEEDED

IMMEDIATE ACTION

The federal government must include universities and colleges in the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) program, and allow for supplemental benefits with the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB).

- Workers in the post-secondary education sector have been laid-off, had positions eliminated, or experienced a reduction in hours. With the threat of reduced enrollment and revenue, and provincial cuts, there is potential for continued job loss in post-secondary education.
- The CEWS currently excludes public universities and colleges, although many receive less than half of their revenues from public funding.
- Allowing access to the wage subsidy program will ensure the rapid resumption of normal operations following the crisis and avoid long-term structural damage to universities and colleges.
- Additionally, if employers are able to supplement income for workers experiencing temporary job loss, they should be allowed to – it is what is best for workers and the economy.

MEDIUM-TERM ACTION

Ensure all Canadians have access to post-secondary education.

- With high levels of unemployment, more Canadians than ever could benefit from training and retraining. Although the federal government has expanded student loans and grants, these grants remain lower than the average tuition and cost will remain a barrier for many students – especially now that COVID-19 has disrupted their income.
- In the worst unemployment crisis since the Great Depression, we need an education guarantee.
- Canada took a bold approach for veterans returning from the Second World War. Similar to the post-war program, renewed federal support could include direct aid to students in the form of grants, as well as grants to universities and colleges to cover the costs of tuition waivers.

Increase the federal transfer to the provinces for post-secondary education with agreements on shared priorities to improve affordability, accessibility and quality.

- Support for students must be complemented with a commitment to long-term, stable and predictable core operating funding. This will ensure that colleges and universities do not continue to increase tuition.
- Stable core funding for education ensures quality and appropriate support for students, it fixes much needed infrastructure needs, and reduces precarious employment.
- The last federal top-up for post-secondary education through the Canada Social Transfer was in 2007.
- Provincial governments are taking divergent approaches, and some do not have the same fiscal maneuvering room as the federal government.
- Now is the time for federal leadership to ensure stable funding for post-secondary education.

