

CASA's 2024 Pre-Budget Submission



CASA
Canadian Alliance of
Student Associations

ACAE

Alliance canadienne des
associations étudiantes



UNION ÉTUDIANTE
DU QUÉBEC

QUEBEC STUDENT
UNION

Recommendations:

1. Invest \$813.6 million annually, indexed to the consumer price index, to permanently set Canada Student Grant maximums at \$4,200 per year and maintain weekly loan maximums at \$300/week.
2. Increase funding to the Post-Secondary Student Support Program and Métis and Inuit Post-Secondary Education Strategies to support Indigenous students in attending post-secondary education.
3. Preserve the educational fair dealing exception under the Copyright Act.
4. Invest \$500 million over 4 years to hire 1,200 new post-secondary counsellors across Canada to address the ongoing mental health crisis in Canada's post-secondary institutions.
5. Unlock housing supply by investing \$3.25 billion dollars to support the addition of 75,000 student-oriented units to be completed within six years.
6. Protect Canadian talent creation by increasing the value of Canada Graduate Scholarships and Post-Doctoral Fellowships by 50%, and doubling the number of these competitive research awards.

Ensuring Equitable Access to Post-Secondary Education

Recommendation #1: Invest \$813.6 million ongoing, indexed to the consumer price index, to permanently set Canada Student Grant maximums at \$4,200 per year and maintain weekly loan maximums at \$300/week.

For the average Canadian student, yearly expenses typically include: off-campus shared housing (\$8,400-\$20,400), groceries (\$4,200), transportation (\$300), and books and supplies (\$2,880)¹. **In total, a Canadian university student can expect a total annual cost of living between \$21,060 and \$33,060², in addition to an average annual tuition of \$6,834 (undergraduate) or \$7,437 (graduate)^{3,4}.** These heavy financial burdens often present significant barriers to accessing post-secondary education for many young Canadians.

The Canada Student Financial Assistance Program (CSFA) plays a crucial role in expanding access to post-secondary education, especially for underrepresented groups, providing financial support for women (62%), students with disabilities (9%), mature students (44%), and Indigenous learners (7%)⁵. As a means-tested program that provides a return-on-investment of \$3.50 for every dollar invested⁶, the federal government has been able to effectively remove financial barriers and ensure equal opportunities for

marginalized students. Budget 2023's one-time investment of \$813.6 million into supporting student financial assistance needs to extend beyond one year to ensure long-term predictability of the CSFA program for students.

Maintaining grant maximums at \$4,200 and weekly loan maximums at \$300 under the CSFA demonstrates a commitment to stability, enabling students from all backgrounds to focus on their studies, knowing that consistent support will be available throughout their academic journey.



Recommendation #2: Increase funding to the Post-Secondary Student Support Program and Métis and Inuit Post-Secondary Education Strategies to support Indigenous student in attending post-secondary education.

Indigenous learners are the most underrepresented group in Canadian post-secondary education, and decades of underfunding have tripled the educational gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations^{7,8,9,10}. Currently, only 8.7% of individuals who identify as First Nations have earned a Bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 9.8% of the more broadly defined Aboriginal population (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit), and 29.3% of the non-Indigenous total Canadian population¹¹. Despite being the fastest-growing population in Canada¹², with over 130,000 learners eligible to attend post-secondary this year¹³, only 1 in 5 eligible Indigenous students receive federal funding today¹⁴.

The Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) comprises 93% of all federal funding to Indigenous students¹⁵, yet recent estimates show the program funds only 24,772 First Nations students¹⁶, less than half those enrolled in post-secondary education¹⁷.

Though funding was expanded in Budget 2019, the PSSSP still does not provide enough funding to meet the demand for Indigenous educa-

tion,¹⁸ and is set to expire in 2024. Access to post-secondary opportunities is a treaty responsibility that the federal government must uphold for Indigenous learners, as outlined in the Numbered Treaties of 1871-1921^{19,20}. The federal government needs to commit to this responsibility and act on the Truth & Reconciliation Commission's call for adequate funding to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education (Call to Action #11)²¹.



Recommendation #3: Preserve the educational fair dealing exception under the Copyright Act.

Across the country, all students are feeling the rising cost of living impact their educational expenses. On average, students pay \$773 per year on textbooks²², with certain in-demand programs having much higher costs, including: Education (\$725.18), Architecture (\$917.24), and Medicine (\$858.80)²³. **Overall, textbook costs in Canada have risen 234% since 2012²⁴, and of a student's average annual cost for post-secondary education (\$19,498.75), approximately 4% (of \$779.95) is due to textbook costs²⁵.** Given these significant expenses, 1 in 2 students (54%) report not buying a textbook due to high costs²⁶.

One method to help students save on educational costs is through fair dealing. Fair dealing is an exception set out in the Copyright Act, 1985²⁷, which for over a decade has granted post-secondary institutions, educators, and students the flexibility to fairly access and use copyrighted work without an undue burden to authors or the various agencies representing them.

Recently, the Supreme Court of Canada issued its final ruling on mandatory collective licensing²⁸, citing that collective provisions of the Copyright Act are intended to protect users, which includes students. Despite this final verdict, collective organizations attempts to have fair dealing removed, as

shown in the FINA committee report recommendation #221²⁹, continue to threaten the student experience. The removal of fair dealing would not only substantially limit the amount of educational resources available for Canada's educators, but would also significantly increase the costs of educational materials for thousands of students. It is essential that the federal government protect fair dealing provisions under the Copyright Act.



Recommendation #4: Invest \$500 million over 4 years to hire 1,200 new post-secondary counsellors across Canada to address the ongoing mental health crisis in Canada's post-secondary institutions.

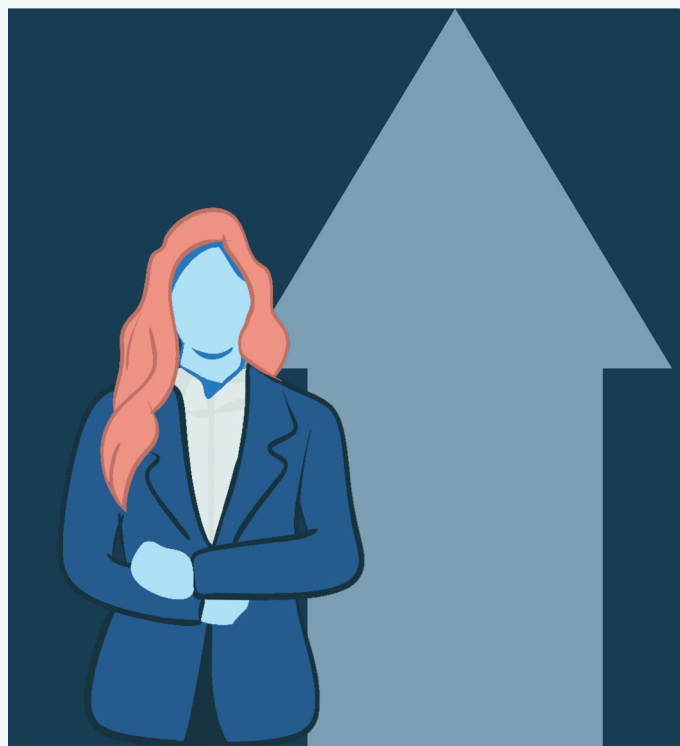
The long term impact of COVID-19 has significantly intensified the existing academic, financial, and emotional challenges that students face in post-secondary education.

According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, post-secondary students across Canada experienced high levels of social isolation (83%), financial distress (64%), and loneliness (61%) during the pandemic³⁰.

To cope with these challenges, students have increasingly turned to mental health services, most commonly seeking on-campus counsellors³¹. However, there are significant barriers to accessing these supports, including lack of funding, wait times, and stigma³². Furthermore, these barriers disproportionately affect students identifying as a visible minority, 2SLGBTQ+, Indigenous, and those with a pre-existing mental illness or disability³³.

Since 2021, the mandate letter commitment to create a new student mental health fund remains unfulfilled, costing student lives as well as student health and well-being, with 76% of students reporting struggles with mental health in post-secondary, amounting to hundreds of thousands of students nationally.³⁴ Given that three quarters of all mental illnesses are diagnosed between the ages of

16-24, it is essential to effectively address these concerns directly at the post-secondary level. The federal government needs to act on its commitment to create a new \$500 million student mental health fund over 4 years^{35,36} to help address



Recommendation #5: Unlock housing supply by investing \$3.25 billion dollars to support the addition of 75,000 student-oriented units to be completed within six years.

Accessible, affordable housing is critical for student success and improving life outcomes, however, thousands of Canadian students continue to face dire housing situations. **Of the 1.3 million students in the private rental market, 3 in 4 report spending 30% or more of their income towards housing costs, and pay, on average, 25% higher rents than all other Canadian households³⁸.** Students often accept unsuitable housing out of desperation to continue their education, intensifying structural inequities based on gender, race, ethnicity, and income.

This case was shown In Summer 2022, when thousands of students nationwide were unable to secure housing before their studies began, resulting in the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) asking students to defer their studies³⁹.

Due to a lack of purpose-built student housing relative to the size of Canada's student population, students are living in housing environments that were designed for other populations - including homeless shelters⁴⁰, and single, detached family homes. Creating housing designed and designated for students unlocks existing housing options for other Canadians across the housing continuum.

In response to current housing

challenges, UPEI constructed a new residence in 2023 costing approximately \$60 million and creating 376 beds⁴¹. However, at roughly \$160,000 per bed, the cost is prohibitive for post-secondary institutions without support.

The federal government can address institutional hesitance directly. It has an infrastructure relationship with Canada's post-secondary institutions, long established through the Post-Secondary Institutions Strategic Investment Fund and its predecessors.⁴²

In light of the housing crisis, and limited options for the federal government to influence housing supply, CASA calls on the government to support institutions through direct cash transfers for eligible projects. Eligible projects would be institution-built units, or student-oriented units built and owned by co-operatives or non-profits.

We call on funded projects to meet student-relevant liveability standards, with maximum increases in rental price each year.

Additionally, CASA calls for a small portions of these funds to be made available for residence retrofits.



Through adding much-needed specialized new construction that is both more dense and at a lower cost than family-oriented housing, Canada can continue action on its emissions reduction targets.

Simultaneously, by inducing post-secondary institutions' investment in housing in their local communities, the Government of Canada is poised not only to improve the living situations of students, but to relieve stressed Canadian rental markets.



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Retaining Canada's Top Talent

Recommendation #6: Protect Canadian talent creation by increasing the value of Canada Graduate Scholarships and Post-Doctoral Fellowships by 50%, and doubling the number of these competitive research awards.

Canada's innovation strategy aims to make Canada a world-leading centre for innovation by leveraging its top talent⁴³. Graduate student researchers are a strong driver behind Canada's success so far, generating \$14.3 billion in research and development (R&D) at Canadian universities, representing 40% of total national R&D^{44,45,46,47,48}.

One of the most effective support mechanisms for Canada's 272,853 graduate student researchers⁴⁹ are the Tri-Agencies scholarships^{50 51 52}. Unfortunately, only 2% of student applicants⁵³ (4,500 total) are awarded these scholarships each year⁵⁴. Additionally, Tri-Agencies award graduate student recipients only \$17,500 (Master's)⁵⁵ or \$35,000 (PhD)⁵⁶, amounts which have not changed since 2004⁵⁷, despite government increases to Tri-Agency funding and inflation rising 48% since 2004⁵⁸.

With the high demands of graduate-level research, most graduate students do not have the capacity to take on additional work to finance their studies. Without access to reliable funding, many graduate students take on higher levels of debt⁵⁹, and are less able to gener-

ate innovative solutions to Canada's ongoing challenges. Tri-Agencies awards set precedents for what other campus researchers are paid across the country.

As science and innovation increasingly contribute to Canada's global reputation, the federal government needs to ensure that its research top talent is effectively supported by increasing the value and doubling the number of Tri-Agency scholarships awarded^{60,61,62}.



These awards and the top talent they generate will ensure Canada remains ready to generate intellectual property, support research in the private sector, tackle climate change, and to address the needs of a changing labour and changing world.



Our Members



About CASA

The Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) is a non-partisan, not-for-profit advocacy organisation representing students at 25 student associations across the country. Through our partnership with the Quebec Student Union/Union étudiante du Québec (UEQ), CASA represents 365,000 students across Canada. CASA advocates for accessible, affordable, innovative, and high quality post-secondary education in Canada. CASA has done so successfully through policy and research development, awareness campaigns, government relations efforts, and partnerships with other stakeholders in the education sector.



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