

{ POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION }

The Current Situation

Alberta has a wide variety of universities, colleges, and technical institutes providing high quality education to Albertans, as well as Canadians from other provinces and people from all over the world. However, over the past two decades, successive provincial governments have treated post-secondary education, at best, as a low priority.

Under Peter Lougheed's government in the 1970s, Alberta had the lowest tuition rates in the country. Twenty years later, tuition rates skyrocketed under Ralph Klein, as his government's massive cuts degraded public services overall and downloaded more and more costs onto Albertans.

In 2013, the PC government made deep cuts of

7.5 per cent that resulted in many staff layoffs, the reduction or elimination of programs, and increased class sizes. Its 2015 budget, which projected a growing deficit, showed plans for further cuts to a system already stretched thin.

The NDP government elected in 2015 reversed the planned cuts and froze tuition levels. The measures relieved pressures in the short-term. Early in 2017, the Minister of Advanced Education publicly expressed an interest in making tuition free for lower-income families, following models in Ontario and New Brunswick. The government is currently reviewing many aspects of post-secondary education in the province, so there are big opportunities for a new long-term direction to emerge.



Priorities for Advancing the Public Interest

The Vision: Embrace more enlightened policies and sustained investment in building a more accessible, affordable, and high quality post-secondary education (PSE) system.

The Government of Alberta must take the following steps to improve post-secondary education in the province:

1. Decolonize and indigenize our post-secondary institutions

- Make Indigenous education a priority
- Ensure governance structures recognize and respect Indigenous peoples
- Implement intellectual and cultural traditions of Indigenous peoples through curriculum and learning approaches relevant to learners and communities
- Support increasing understanding and reconciliation
- Increase the number of Indigenous employees and senior administrators
- Establish Indigenous-centric services
- Actively build relationships with and be accountable to Indigenous communities

2. Reverse past policies that have transferred more of the costs of post-secondary education onto students

- Increase government investment for post-secondary institutions
- Make tuition fees more affordable so PSE is accessible to everyone, regardless of socioeconomic situation
- Regulate tuition fees for international students to ensure changes to their tuition levels are proportional to those of domestic students
- Provide more grants for low-income, rural, and Indigenous students to ensure PSE is truly open to all
- Strictly regulate mandatory non-instructional fees

3. Improve the quality and accessibility of post-secondary education

- Increase program spaces to the national average to stop turning away so many qualified prospective students from colleges, institutes, and universities, and to allow many more students to develop their full potential
- End the systemic practice of precarious employment for faculty and support staff at post-secondary institutions to improve conditions for students in their research and education

4. Recognize and support quality research at post-secondary institutions as a public good

- Make investments in quality post-secondary education sustainable so Alberta will be able to develop the diverse knowledge and skills of professionals and tradespeople needed for the future
- Focus on attracting and retaining quality faculty, staff, and graduate students to improve post-secondary education, conduct important research, and provide a foundation for a more robust economy
- Recognize in policy and practice that the purpose of post-secondary education goes beyond vocational training to improve our economy and includes equipping students with critical thinking and analysis skills to be engaged citizens

5. Reform the governance of post-secondary institutions to focus on the public interest

- Make the recruitment process for boards of post-secondary institutions far more transparent with a clear departure from past government practices of using them for patronage appointments
- Ensure strong representation on institutions' Board of Governors from undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and support staff
- Replace the ability of boards to unilaterally decide who is or is not considered a member of faculty associations replacing it with a more collaborative approach.

6. Address the mental health needs of students and staff

- Immediately fund the implementation of the recommendation from *Valuing Mental Health: Report of the Alberta Mental Health Review Committee 2015* that reads: "Create healthy and supportive post-secondary campus environments through health promotion, addiction and mental health campus services, and community partnerships."