



2020-2021

Alberta Budget

Recommendations

Table of Contents

Who We Are	1
Summary of Recommendations:	2
Supporting Students, Support the Economy	3
Healthy and Safe Campuses	5
Funding Institutions, Supporting Affordability	8

Who We Are

The Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) represents over 140,000 undergraduate students at MacEwan University, Mount Royal University, Athabasca University, the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge. As elected student leaders from all five institutions, we advocate on behalf of our students to university administrations, the government, and the greater community. We also govern our individual students' unions to improve services and the student experience at our institutions.

For over one hundred years, student associations and student unions (SAs) have played a key role in the lives of students on Alberta's campuses. Originally, these associations focused on recreational and academic pursuits; however, as time passed, students started demanding more. Student associations opened campus pubs or art galleries to display students' work. They started Safe Walk programs to ensure students had company when walking on campus at night. As student needs and priorities shifted, student associations adapted to respond to the needs of the student body.

For over 30 years, CAUS has worked on behalf of Alberta's undergraduates by conducting research and lobbying the Government of Alberta for measured changes, meeting with Ministers and Members of the Legislative Assembly. Undergraduates make up about half of Alberta's post-secondary students, and we share many priorities with apprentices, graduate students, and college students. We encourage decision-makers to engage with all of Alberta's post-secondary students.



Summary of Recommendations:

CAUS Recommends:

- The Government of Alberta invest \$30 million in the Campus Alberta Mental Health Grant.
- The Government of Alberta invest \$5 million in preventing sexual violence by providing training and support on campuses.
- The Government of Alberta maintains the current funding level of operating supports for Post-secondary Institutions.
- The Government of Alberta limit tuition increases to Alberta CPI.
- The Government of Alberta invest \$30 million to create a work integrated learning jobs program.

Supporting Students, Support the Economy

Encouraging Work Integrated Learning, Supporting skills development

Maintaining employment throughout enrolment in post-secondary education has become more common amongst students for a variety of reasons. Deviation from the “traditional” schedule of primarily finding employment during the summer months is no longer the norm, as the student demographic has diversified greatly to include those who are returning to studies, supplementing their professional experience or education, single parents, and mature students, to name a few.

The costs of education, including tuition, fees, and the costs of living, have substantially increased as well. Coupled with rising financial burdens, students also seek employment in their field of study to remain competitive as they enter the workforce upon graduation. Work experience has shown to make a student almost twice as likely to be hired than those without work experience.¹ However, even outside of the unprecedented times we live in currently under COVID-19, the youth unemployment rate in Alberta remains significantly higher than the general population.² In October 2019, 13.4% of youth aged 15 to 24 were unemployed compared to the general unemployment rate of 6.8%; in October 2020, 23% for youth compared to 10.7% for the general population. While Alberta prepares to return the economy to a pre-covid level, the Government of Alberta must ensure that Alberta’s youth are not left behind.

CAUS calls on the Government of Alberta to invest in Alberta’s youth by encouraging private businesses to hire students in program relevant positions. A Student Employment Program, would help more students reap the benefits of finding meaningful work experience regardless of their financial background. Data on current work opportunities can also be used to tailor experiences closer towards a students’ field of study. Students should be aware of what opportunities in their field of study are supported through this program, so they can find employment that will best prepare them for the workforce.

¹ Canadian Alliance of Student Associations. Student (un)Employment, 2017. https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/casaacae/pages/1275/attachments/original/1526062386/Student_%28Un%29Employment_in_Canada.pdf?1526062386

² Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0287-01 Labour force characteristics, monthly, seasonally adjusted and trend-cycle, last 5 months

Similar initiatives are reflected through hybrid model application programs in Saskatchewan (Canada Saskatchewan Job Grant)³ and Ontario⁴, which allow students to search and apply for specific jobs related to their education, while allowing employers to approach candidates they feel are best suited to meet their organization's needs.

Tying the student positions to program-related content will ensure that the students can reinforce the concepts taught in the classroom with real world practical application. Students will be able to develop the skills employers are looking for from the experts already in the field.

CAUS Recommends:

- The Government of Alberta invest \$30 million to create a work integrated learning jobs program.

³ Government of Saskatchewan. Canada Saskatchewan Job Grant, 2018. <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/business/hire-train-and-manage-employees/apply-for-the-canada-saskatchewan-job-grant>

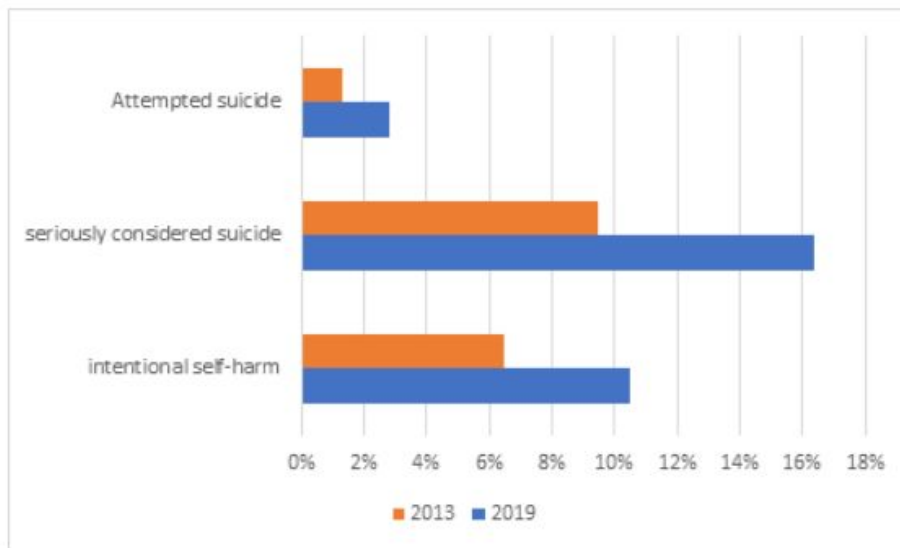
⁴ Government of Ontario. Employment programs for people under 30, 2018. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/employment-programs-people-under-30>

Healthy and Safe Campuses

Maintain and increase per-student mental health funding.

Students learn best in a safe and supportive environment. While universities have been working to address students' calls for improved quality of life on campus, they cannot do this alone. The Government of Alberta has supported mental health initiatives on post-secondary campuses for almost a decade (by funding professional services offered to students), but since the funding was not originally distributed equitably, only some institutions were able to significantly reduce wait times at campus counselling centers. The most recent National College Health Assessment data highlights the severe effects of failing to prioritize mental health support.

Figure 4: Students reporting on issues of self-harm and suicide, past 12 Months



Source: [Higher Education Strategy Associates](#)

As university enrolment in Alberta is poised to surge in coming years,^{5 6} demand on these services will only grow. It is crucial that predictable funding be allocated on a per-student basis, to stop the resources per student from eroding. In 2013 the University of Lethbridge was

⁵ Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0057-01 Projected population, by projection scenario, age and sex, as of July 1 (x 1,000)

⁶ Government of Alberta. Alberta Post-secondary Enrollment (FLE) projections. 2019. <https://open.alberta.ca/opendata/alberta-post-secondary-enrolment-fle-projections#summary>

granted \$147 per Full Load Equivalent (FLE) and was able to drastically reduce the waiting lists for their services. CAUS calls on the Government of Alberta to fund on campus mental health services at \$165 per FLE, the 2013 rate adjusted for inflation. CAUS projects \$30 million would be required to equally fund all students within Alberta's post-secondary systems.

CAUS continues to call on the provincial government to provide equitable per-student funding through multi-year envelopes to institutions. This will enable them to create longer-term strategies when addressing the mental health and wellness of students.

CAUS Recommends:

- The Government of Alberta invest \$30 million in the Campus Alberta Mental Health Grant.

Increase support for sexual violence prevention and response.

The Government of Alberta should build on the positive work enabled by the Mental Health Grant by tackling other province-wide campus safety initiatives, such as ending campus sexual violence. Campus sexual violence robs students of an environment to safely and confidently pursue educational endeavours and enriching experiences. In 2014, Statistics Canada indicated that of the 636,000 cases of self-reported sexual assault incidents, 87% were committed against women. Nearly 47% of these involved women between the ages of 15-24.⁷ This second statistic highlights the fact that sexual violence is a huge concern on post-secondary campuses, which have a high concentration of this demographic. Of further concern is the fact that for many reasons, including institutional policies, the number of cases is under-reported.^{8 9} A 2014 Statistics Canada survey suggested that 83% of sexual assault incidents are not reported to the police.¹⁰ In recent years, students have become more willing than ever to recognize their experiences anonymously (as in the NCHA survey data). They are reaching out for support, and it is incumbent upon student associations, universities, and the province to reach back.

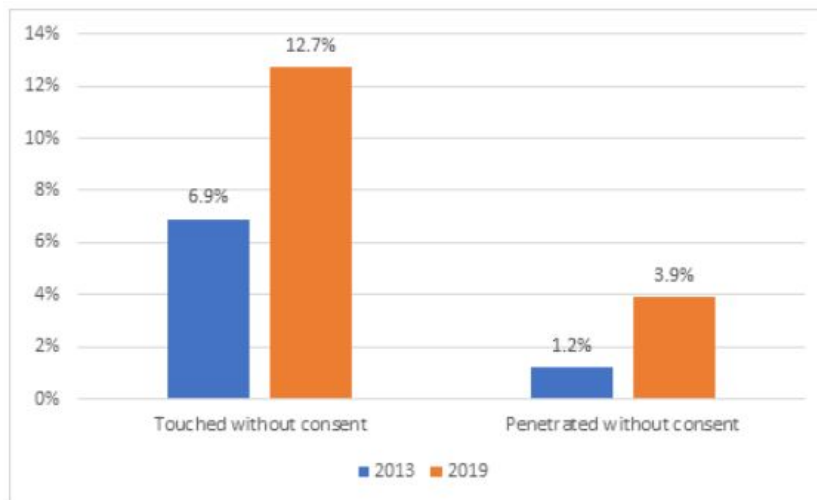
⁷ Conroy, S., & Cotter, A. (2017). Self-reported sexual assault in Canada, 2014. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/14842-eng.htm>

⁸ McCallion, G., & Feder, J. (2015). Sexual violence at institutions of higher education. In Watts, M.P. (Ed), Sexual violence on campus: Overview, issues and actions (1-38). New York: Nova Publishers.

⁹ Mellins CA, Walsh K, Sarvet AL, Wall M, Gilbert L, Santelli JS, et al. (2017) Sexual assault incidents among college undergraduates: Prevalence and factors associated with risk. PLoS ONE, 12(11). 1-23.

¹⁰ Conroy, S., & Cotter, A. (2017). Self-reported sexual assault in Canada, 2014. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/14842-eng.htm>

Figure 5: Students reporting on issues of sexual assault, past 12 Months



Source: [Higher Education Strategy Associates](#)

Some Alberta institutions have set up broad-based solutions on campus that provide everything from training, programming, and support services and advocate to combat campus sexual violence. A notable example is the University of Alberta's Sexual Assault Centre, which has been part of the campus community for 25 years. It delivers programs and services such as counselling, advocacy for academic accommodations, and medical or reporting support. It seeks to encourage a shift on campus through education programs on sexual assault disclosure, and workshops on bystander intervention and survivor support skills.¹¹

CAUS calls on the Government of Alberta to address campus sexual violence by funding services and campus that can be provided on campuses and through digital means. Ensuring individual campus have the resources to not only investigate cases of sexual violence but to also address campus cultural that allow sexual violence to propagate.

CAUS Recommends:

- The Government of Alberta invest \$5 million in preventing sexual violence by providing training and support services on campuses.

¹¹ University of Alberta Sexual Assault Centre. (n.d.b). About us. Retrieved from <https://www.ualberta.ca/current-students/sexual-assault-centre>

Funding Institutions, Supporting Affordability

Invest in Alberta's world-class post-secondary education with stable funding.

Post-secondary funding has been described as sedimentary. Year after year, different funding envelopes and increases layer upon each other to constitute the total base operating grant. Over time, the rationale for why an institution receives specific funding often gets lost. Meanwhile, provincial governments increase or decrease funding in fat and lean years, or invest further when they see fit, often without regard to the capacities and needs that motivated the funding in the first place.

Recent shifts toward performance-based funding further complicate these challenges. Measures tied to outcomes an institution cannot control, such as employment attainment after completion, can be nothing but detrimental to the institutions; either the measure is low enough to not matter, or high enough to be unattainable and a guaranteed loss. In short, a performance-based funding system with poorly chosen and calibrated metrics is an all-stick, no-carrot approach that disguises additional cuts.

Deep cuts threaten Alberta's post-secondary sector with lasting damage. In the 1990s, funding for post-secondary education declined as part of the province's deficit reduction strategy. The province discontinued the capital grant program and allowed tuition to increase significantly.¹² Over three years, the government slashed base operating grants by 21%.¹³ Institutions increased student fees, restricted wages, and cut faculty positions in a desperate attempt to maintain educational quality and capacity for increasing numbers of prospective students. The government established new slates of performance indicators across its agencies, boards, and commissions. Legislators then called for better performance to distract from the reduction in government support, leaving the public with the impression that funding increases are not warranted until performance improved.¹⁴ Reducing spending while implementing performance metrics that result in less funding can create a death spiral where institutions lack the resources

¹² Hauserman, C., & Stick, S. The History of Post-Secondary Finance in Alberta - An Analysis. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, Issue #42, June 9, 2005.

¹³ Alberta Learning, Adult Learning Division. (2000). Report of the MLA post-secondary funding review committee. Edmonton, Alberta: Alberta Learning.

¹⁴ Burke, J. C. and Minassians, H. (2001). Linking state resources to campus results: From fad to trend. The fifth annual survey (2001). Albany New York: The Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government.

to improve performance because of funding cuts. This is especially true with funding models that make cuts inevitable.

As the students of Alberta's universities, we warn that we see a similar pattern recurring. After Alberta's Budget 2019, post-secondary education consultant Alex Usher wrote: "Successive generations of Alberta governments understood perfectly well they were buying a Mercedes-level PSE system because they felt that was what the public wanted. To turn around and blame the Merc for not being a Honda serves no purpose other than to gaslight taxpayers and gin them up to blame public institutions for doing nothing more than what governments of the day asked them to do."¹⁵ Usher emphasized the value that Alberta has reaped from that investment, including major research universities and a powerful polytechnic system. Alberta's per-student funding, currently the highest in Canada, must be understood as an investment whose value needs to be preserved. It is also vital to understand that per-student funding has not increased excessively: in fact, it has kept pace with the rising cost of living, until recently.^{16 17}

18 19

¹⁵ *One Thought*, Higher Education Strategy Associates (October 25, 2019). Retrieved from <https://higheredstrategy.com/that-alberta-budget/>

¹⁶ Government of Alberta. Unique Students by Enrollment, Institution and Sector for 2014-15 Forward. Retrieved from

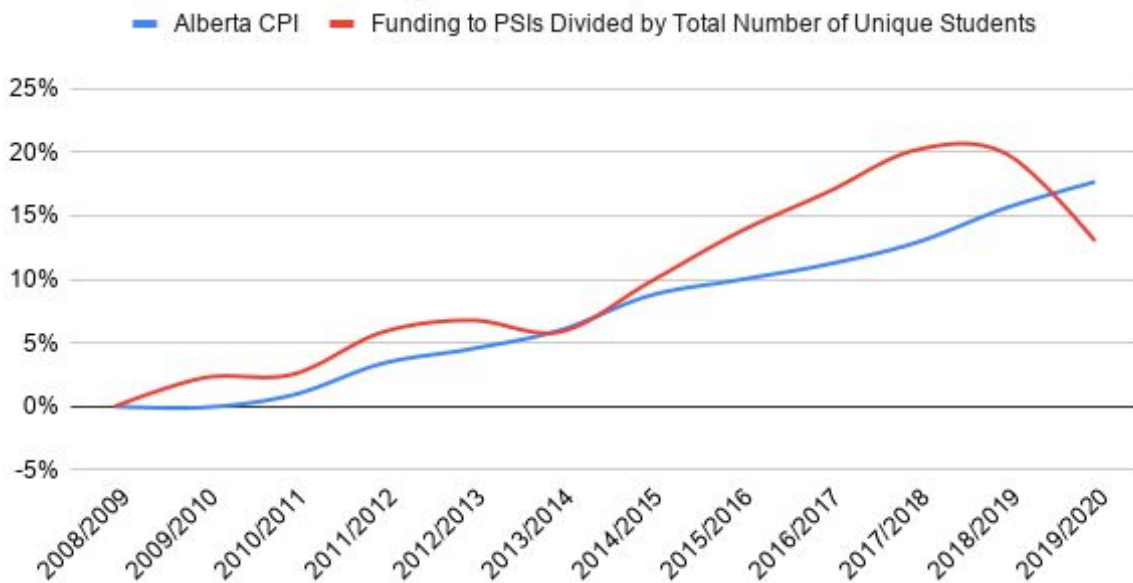
<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/9d5b3f25-3fa5-4600-a48c-ba200ca6c4a8/resource/0f755ee8-a5e2-4567-9527-e491282183e9/download/five-year-unique-learner-enrolment-summary-table.pdf>

¹⁷ Statistics Canada. [Table 18-10-0005-01 Consumer Price Index, annual average, not seasonally adjusted](#)

¹⁸ Government of Alberta. Government Estimates. Retrieved from <https://www.alberta.ca/budget-documents.aspx>

¹⁹ The total number of unique students for 2019/2020 was estimated using the Government of Alberta's Post-secondary Enrolment (FLE) Projection for 2019/20, adjusted by the prior year's ratio of unique students to FLEs.

Cumulative Changes to Alberta CPI and Per-student Funding for Post-secondary Institutions, 2008/2009-2019/2020



The government should base post-secondary funding on a publicly available formula that would let individuals and institutions project funding outcomes with a reasonable level of accuracy. Stable, predictable funding is vital to the sector's success. Being able to plan over multiple budget cycles will enable institutions to strategically grow and adapt to Alberta's ever-changing needs. CAUS calls on the Government of Alberta to maintain current funding levels and to reverse the current trend of funding reductions.

CAUS Recommends:

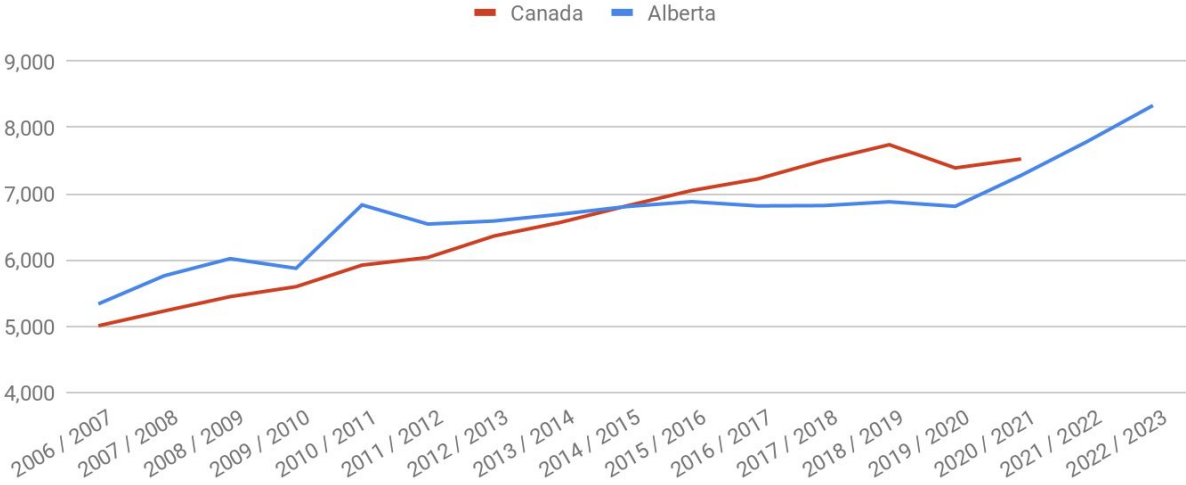
- The Government of Alberta maintains the current funding level of operating supports for Post-secondary Institutions.

Tuition fees

CAUS has long stood for a post-secondary system built on predictability – which can be most demonstrably implemented through tuition rates for all post-secondary programs across Alberta. Before the 1990s, Canada was viewed as having a relatively affordable post-secondary system; students from low-income households were able to take out government-subsidized loans to make-up for a much smaller financial gap than there is today, mostly due to the lower tuition rates of the time. Since 1990, post-secondary students have seen a 375% increase in tuition levels, which is an extreme and unprecedented increase. These dramatic increases were finally curbed in Alberta when Ralph Klein limited increases to tuition to Alberta’s CPI in the mid 2000s.

When increases to tuition at Alberta’s public post-secondaries were tied to the Alberta CPI, students were able to project future costs for tuition and fees, while the increases remained generally in line with increases to earnings. While the cost to attend an Alberta post-secondary is expected to dramatically rise over the next few years, due in part to the 22.5% increase to tuition over three years (7% compounded), students are becoming increasingly concerned by the level of debt they are expecting to graduate with and their ability to repay it. CAUS believes that Alberta should have a post-secondary education system that is accessible and affordable for all.

Average Tuition and Fees for Canada and Alberta with projection



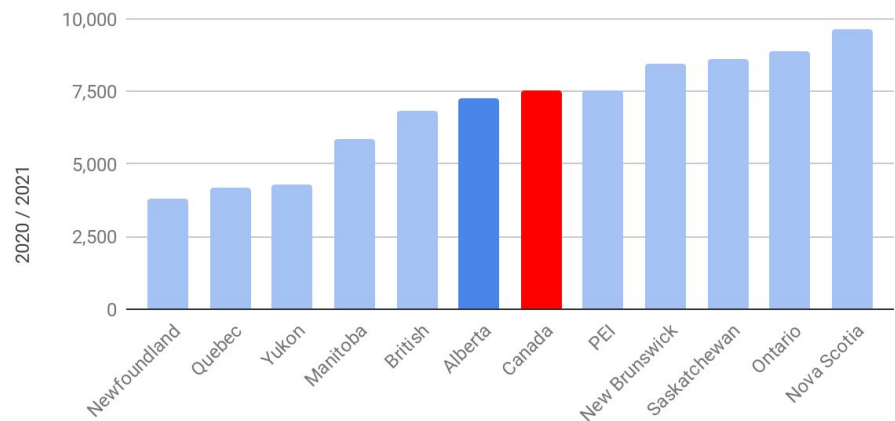
Source: Statistics Canada. Table 37-10-0121-01

In our current economic reality, students face incredible financial burdens associated with the cost of their education, and are unable to plan for their futures effectively. CAUS remains concerned about the detrimental effects these increases will have on students' ability to successfully access and/or complete their degrees.

The current Tuition Fees Regulation allows for three consecutive years with 7% increases to tuition only ensures predictability that tuition will remain unaffordable for many Albertans. Tuition is likely to increase by 22.5% from the 2019/2020 academic year to the 2023/2024, approximately \$1,500 in 3 year. In addition to tuition, Alberta post-secondaries charge some of the highest mandatory non-instructional fees in Canada. While Alberta ranks sixth highest tuition and fees, just below the Canadian average, the allowed increases to tuition will likely push Alberta above the national average. CAUS is concerned that students will seek their post-secondary education from institutions in other provinces with less expensive tuition costs. Post-secondary years are formative in a person's life, as it is at this time that students, independent of their parents, start setting up their own community roots. As such, young adults are more likely to remain close to their alma mater than to return to the home community. It is possible Alberta

could experience a "brain drain" as our most talented young adults leave Alberta to study a different province only to remain there.

2020 / 2021 Tuition and Fees Provincial Comparison



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 37-10-0121-01

CAUS Recommends:

- The Government of Alberta limit tuition increases to Alberta CPI.