

Investing in Students, Investing in Alberta's Future



2022/2023 Priorities Document

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Who we are:

The Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) represents over 114,000 undergraduate students at Athabasca University, MacEwan University, Mount Royal University, the University of Alberta, and the University of Lethbridge. CAUS is composed of elected student leaders from these five institutions, and is professionally managed and supported by a permanent staff team.

CAUS advocates on behalf of our students to various different stakeholders, both within the government and the broader community. Our members also govern their individual students' unions to improve services and the student experience at our institutions.

As student government executives, we were elected to ensure Albertan students have access to the highest-quality education possible. Our priorities reflect this mandate.



**STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION
OF MACEWAN UNIVERSITY**



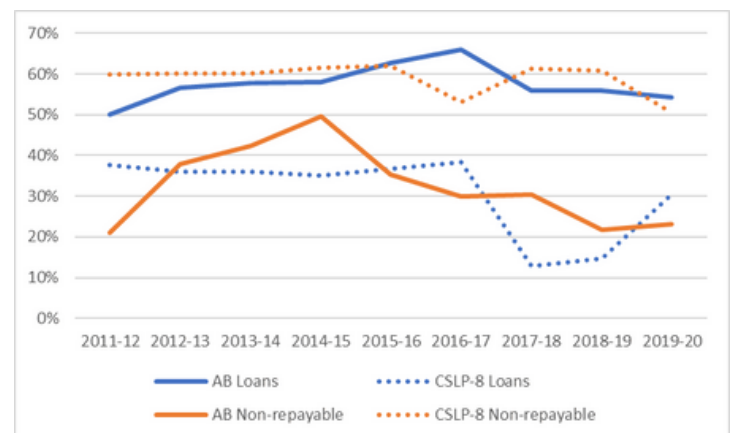
**THE UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE
STUDENTS' UNION**



Increasing Affordability of Post-Secondary Education

When it comes to barriers preventing students from attending university, one key obstacle both within Alberta and across Canada is affordability. However, while virtually all Canadians have been impacted by a higher cost of living, (which in turn impacts the ability to afford post-secondary education), **Alberta has had the highest tuition increases across Canada for the past two years,**[1] posing a profound barrier to students seeking to obtain post-secondary education. At present, the Government of Alberta has allocated \$980 million for student loans, compared to \$168 million allocated for scholarships, grants, and awards combined [2].

As advocates for affordable post-secondary education, CAUS recognizes the complexity of this issue and the challenges of finding effective policy solutions. However, one promising potential way to increase affordability is by increasing student access to non-repayable grants.



In creating a targeted financial support program for the students with the highest need, **non-repayable grants serve as an effective solution to both addressing some of the more profound barriers around affordability**, while also supporting equity by recognizing that not all students have the same financial resources and related needs.

CAUS Recommends:

The Government of Alberta invests an additional \$200 million annually into non-repayable up-front grants.

The Government of Alberta assess the use of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund to increase the affordability of PSE in the province.

Ending Domestic and Gender Based Violence on Campus

In February of 2022, the Government of Alberta announced a new grant of \$2.5 million to be provided to post-secondary institutions to support training and awareness programs on campuses to counter sexual violence. This funding was a welcome action towards countering the issue of sexual violence, one which is increasingly prevalent on our campuses.[3] However, **as long as sexual violence continues to exist on Albertan post-secondary campuses, so too will there be an ongoing need for government action.**

In early 2020, CAUS released a first-of-its-kind research paper on the prevalence of sexual violence on university campuses. This paper, the result of 2 years of intensive research, includes **5 recommendations that CAUS has provided to the Government of Alberta as a pathway to address campus sexual violence.** These include both policy and funding asks and an overview of programs to be implemented at post-secondary institutions.

CAUS Recommends:

The Government of Alberta should allocate consistent and adequate funding towards efforts focused specifically on training and prevention of campus sexual violence in Alberta, based on the financial asks of individual PSIs.

The Government of Alberta should work with individual PSIs and commit to consistent and sufficient funding for the most appropriate support services dedicated to anyone across Alberta affected by campus sexual violence.

The Government of Alberta should fund the development of online-based training that institutions can use as a baseline to educate their campus staff and faculty on effective and supportive responses to sexual violence disclosures.

Developing Digital Infrastructure

At present, **roughly 67% of rural Albertans, and 80% of Indigenous communities, do not have access to reliable high-speed internet at federal target speeds** [4]. For current and potential post-secondary students living within communities lacking reliable internet access, attending school means relocating, an additional burden to post-secondary access.



The Alberta Broadband Strategy seeks to address these digital inequities by working to create 100% connectivity in Alberta by the end of the fiscal year in 2026/2027 [4]. This policy serves as an excellent step in supporting equal access to post-secondary education, and CAUS wants to ensure that the Government of Alberta both understands how important this strategy is, and **recognizes the need for increased investment specifically into oriented digital infrastructure.**

CAUS Recommends:

That the Government of Alberta stays the course of the Alberta Broadband Strategy, recognizing the importance of ensuring equal access to digital infrastructure for all Albertans, particularly students.

The Government of Alberta should direct increased funding towards operating grants for post-secondary institutions in order to specifically increase digital access and capacity.

Strengthening Indigenous Futures

Indigenous peoples in Canada have a complicated history with the government and with the education system. Through the hideous history of residential schools, it must be noted that **the government and educational institutions have a lot of work to do in order to meet the TRC calls to action**, as well as to more broadly re-inspire confidence in the systems in place.

CAUS Recommends:

To continue their commitment to the Indigenous people of this land, we ask that the government of Alberta invest capital in recruiting Indigenous learners to post secondary education rurally, on reserves and in urban centres.

We also ask that a portion of those funds be allocated to student associations so that there can be continuity across all post secondary institutions in terms of cultural & educational Indigenous centres.

Through this funding, we can create a framework guided by Indigenous leaders in the field. **We stand with the Assembly of First Nations recommendations, “Post-secondary education is an inherent and Treaty right recognised and affirmed in international law.”** [5]

Investing in Campus Mental Health

While COVID-19 has undoubtedly worsened the mental health of many students, it is worth noting that the mental health crisis on university campuses existed well before the pandemic. For example, in 2019, nearly 70% of students at Canadian post-secondary institutions reported feelings of 'overwhelming anxiety.' [6]

Students across Canada and Alberta are in crisis, and appropriate action needs to be taken to ensure that those in need of mental health resources can access them no matter where these students may be located.

As university enrolment in Alberta is poised to surge in coming years, demand for existent services will only grow. Therefore, **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 granted \$147 per Full Load Equivalent (FLE) and drastically reduced the waiting lists for their services [7]. Similar funding guarantees would guarantee timely and effective mental health access across Alberta's PSIs. While increased funding for increased access to services may not fully solve the mental health crisis, it plays a significant role in supporting students in their moment of need.



CAUS Recommends:

The Government of Alberta increases mental health funding commitments to \$172 per FLE at each institution. [8]

Supporting Students' Career Development

In a rapidly evolving economy, it is essential that students enrolled in both arts and STEM disciplines have opportunities to build the professional skill sets necessary for post graduate employment. Reflecting on the benefits of the Work-Integrated Learning Industry Voucher pilot program, which offers students paid work experience placements related to their field of study, **CAUS considers it crucial that as many post-secondary students as possible have the opportunity to benefit from on-the-job experience as part of their degree programs.**

Moreover, a student's ability to put down professional roots in Alberta during their degree is integral to their later decision to remain in the province post-graduation. A 2022 report from the Canada West Foundation (CFW) notes that for the first time since 1988, more youth aged 15-29 moved out of Alberta than moved in [9]. While not all youth are students, and not all students are youth, there are undoubtedly ties between the post-secondary sector and trends in youth migration within Alberta.

By increasing investment in work integrated learning at the post-secondary level, **students will have the opportunity to build valuable career connections in their field prior to graduation**, increasing their likelihood of establishing professional lives in Alberta.

CAUS Recommends:

That the Government of Alberta pursues continued investment in and expansion of the Work-integrated Learning Industry Voucher pilot program.

Standardization of the micro-credential framework across Alberta.

Increased investment in career centers across Alberta's universities and PSIs to support students in developing professional networks and obtaining permanent positions in their fields of study post-graduation.

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