

PART 1: LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #1: Universally Accessible System of Post-Secondary Education

1. Restore federal transfers to provinces and territories for post-secondary education to 1996 levels in order to restore funding lost after the \$2.29 billion cut in 1996, and account for enrollment growth and inflation since then. **Cost:** \$5.76 billion per year.
2. Establish an ongoing transfer to the provinces and territories in order to eliminate tuition fees. Tuition fees would be priced at 1995-1996 levels, the year preceding the massive \$2.29 billion cut in 1996. **Cost:** \$3.77 billion per year.
3. Eliminate interest on direct loans through the Canada Student Loans Program (CSLP) and provide Stage 2 assistance for all CSLP borrowers five years after graduation in order to reduce the principal of borrowers' loans. Part-time students, like full-time students, should not be required to pay until six months after graduation. **Cost:** \$1.18 billion per year.

Recommendation #2: Decolonize Learning

1. Invest \$424.8 million over three years to address the backlog in applicants to the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) **Cost:** \$141.6 million per year for three years.
2. Dedicate funding to support the development of Indigenous learning materials and language courses at the post-secondary level. **Cost:** \$10 million per year.

Recommendation #3: Graduate Students and Research

1. Extend eligibility for Canada Student Grants to graduate students. **Cost:** \$25 million per year.
2. Explore the creation of dedicated research fellowships for Indigenous and international students.

Recommendation #4: Improvements to Healthcare and Mental Health Supports

1. Allocate \$300 million over two years to a fund dedicated to improving on-campus mental health services. The fund, modelled after the Post-Secondary Institutions Strategic Investment Fund, would allow post-secondary institutions to apply for federal grants to improve on-campus mental health services. **Cost:** \$300 million per year over two years.
2. Create a dedicated mental health stream to ensure ongoing mental health promotion and prompt treatment of mental illnesses through a nationwide program in accordance with the principles and criteria of the Canada Health Act. **Cost:** \$350 million over three years.
3. Create a single-payer national pharmacare plan to improve knowledge of drug safety, lower costs for Canadians and governments, and improve health outcomes. **Cost:** \$11.5 billion per year.

Recommendation #5: Fairness for International Students

1. Extend eligibility for the Canada Summer Jobs program to international students.
2. As part of its duties under the Canada Health Act, the federal government should require provinces and territories to offer the same public health care to international students that is provided to domestic residents.

Recommendation #6: Support for Parents and Children

Implement a nationwide universal child care program. **Cost:** \$1 billion in first year, then growing by \$1 billion per year until reaching 1% of GDP.

PART 2: CONTEXT AND EXPLANATION

Recommendation #1: Universally Accessible System of Post-Secondary Education

Ensuring Canada's competitiveness requires educated, active participants in our economy. We need to unleash the potential of the most talented members of our society — not just the wealthiest. To achieve this goal, the ongoing underfunding of post-secondary education must be addressed. In a country where the great majority of new jobs require some form of post-secondary education, we need to eliminate student debt loads and unfair interest rates on student loans because they discourage lower-income people from pursuing higher education and stifle consumer spending, investment, and innovation.

In 2015, debt owed to the Canada Student Loans Program reached \$19 billion.¹ Financing post-secondary education through student loans is an inequitable model that requires students from low- and middle-income backgrounds to pay more for their education than students who can afford to pay the full cost upfront. A student who must take out \$30,000 in loans to finance their education will pay \$10,318 more for their education over 10 years through accumulated interest on these loans.²

The federal government has a responsibility to ensure that students in every province have access to a high-quality and affordable system of post-secondary education. In 2013-2014, total federal spending on post-secondary education was approximately \$12.8 billion. In that same year, the federal government spent approximately \$3 billion on tax measures and the Canada Education Savings Program, both of which primarily benefit students who belong to families from the two highest income quintiles.³

Budget 2019 provides an opportunity to introduce new funding, and to reallocate current funding, to ensure federal expenditures are creating a system of post-secondary education that is accessible to all.

Recommendation #2: Decolonize Learning

Boosting Canada's competitiveness requires lifting up all members of our society in order to unleash their talents and productivity, and to spark innovation and promote social unity with new ways of thinking, learning, and communicating. It is therefore imperative that we continue making education more inclusive of Indigenous learners, and that we close achievement gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The Ottawa-based Centre for the Study of Living standards concluded, for example, that "Canada's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would be \$36.4 billion greater in 2031 if the Indigenous education attainment gap and related gaps for employment rates and income by level of employment were closed."⁴

Students were pleased to see a \$90 million per year investment, for two years, in the Post-Secondary Student Support Program in Budget 2017. However, more investment is required — on an ongoing, annual basis — in order to address the backlog of program applicants and to accommodate the rapid growth of this demographic of learners.

¹ Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions of Canada (Office of the Chief Actuary), "Actuarial Report on the Canada Student Loans Program" (Ottawa: June 2015).

² Ibid.

³ Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer (Government of Canada), "Federal Spending on Post-Secondary Education" (May 9, 2016).

⁴ Calver, Matthew. 2015. "Closing the Aboriginal Education Gap in Canada: Assessing Progress and Estimating the Economic Benefits." Centre for the Study of Living Standards: Ottawa.

Additionally, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission emphasized, post-secondary institutions have an important role to play in honouring and preserving Indigenous languages and cultures. To that end, funds should be allocated to support the development of culturally appropriate curricula at the post-secondary level, including courses and programs in Indigenous languages, cultures, and history.

Recommendation #3: Graduate Students and Research

The commitment to basic research in Budget 2018 goes a long way towards ensuring innovation and Canada's competitiveness. It is also important to ensure that historically underrepresented groups have the means and incentives to pursue graduate studies, both as a matter of equality of opportunity and for the purpose of bringing diverse perspectives to bear on the social and technological challenges facing Canadian society in an increasingly complex and competitive global system.

While enrolment in graduate programs continues to increase steadily, the number of Canada Graduate Scholarships has not changed since 2007. In addition, the value of these awards has not changed since their establishment in 2003, resulting in a 25 percent decline in their value due to inflation.⁵

By expanding eligibility to the needs-based Canada Student Grants, more underrepresented students could pursue graduate studies and all graduate students could focus on completing their research. In turn, a more highly educated and diverse Canadian workforce would fuel research and innovation in both the public and private sectors. In the same vein, the creation of dedicated research fellowships for Indigenous and international students would serve to support the diversity of perspectives, and solutions to problems, that are crucial to ensuring Canada's competitiveness.

Recommendation #4: Improvements to Healthcare and Mental Health Supports

It is widely recognized that ensuring Canada's competitiveness requires a healthy workforce: body and mind. Early life experiences and access to healthcare play enormous roles in determining the productivity of the workforce.⁶ It is therefore crucial to ensure that students and their families have access to adequate healthcare, including psychological care, both on and off campus.

In Spring 2016, over 43,000 students from more than 42 post-secondary institutions across Canada responded to the National College Health Assessment. This survey found that, within the last 12 months: 89.5 percent of respondents felt overwhelmed by all they had to do; 59.6 percent of respondents felt that things were hopeless; 73.7 percent felt very sad; 44.4 percent felt so depressed it was difficult to function; and, 13 percent of respondents had seriously considered suicide.⁷

Structural and financial constraints on post-secondary institutions have negatively impacted the ability of these institutions both to be a supportive setting for this growth and to provide necessary mental health services. The need for mental health services has far outpaced the ability of institutions to deliver them, as evidenced by growing waiting lists and restrictions on on-campus services.

⁵ Advisory Panel for the Review of Federal Support for Fundamental Science. April 2017. "Investing in Canada's Future: Strengthening the Foundations of Canadian Research."

⁶ Public Health Agency of Canada. May 2009. "Investing in prevention: The economic perspective." Government of Canada.

⁷ American College Health Association. 2016. "Canadian Reference Group Executive Summary Spring 2016," in *American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment II*.

Students support the creation of a dedicated federal funding stream to ensure ongoing mental health promotion and prompt treatment of mental illnesses across Canada. We also support a single-payer national pharmacare plan, to improve prescribing behaviour and health outcomes, and ensure cheaper access to prescription drugs in order to lower costs for both Canadians and governments.

Recommendation #5: Fairness for International Students

The economic contribution collectively made by international students is substantial. In fact, the total annual expenditure by international students, and visiting friends and family, stood at \$11.4 billion in 2014. Every year, spending by international students supports over 100,000 full time equivalent jobs in the Canadian economy.⁸ Moreover, international students contribute to the diversity of our campuses, providing additional points of view and critical perspectives. What these contributions illustrate is how vital it is for Canada to distinguish itself as an attractive destination for students from around the world.

Provincial policies of differential fees have created a system where international students pay three to four times more in tuition fees for the same education as their domestic peers. This unfortunate reality mixed with the stress of being away from one's home country can generate additional wellness struggles and a greater need for job security.

Currently, the Canada Summer Jobs program excludes international students from participation, a restriction that can and should be removed. Moreover, the health and wellness of students studying in Canada should be a public consideration. As such, we recommend that as part of its duties under the Canada Health Act, the federal government should require provinces and territories to offer the same public health care to international students that is provided to domestic residents.

Recommendation #6: Support for Parents and Children

According to the Ottawa-based Child Care Now advocacy organization, Canadian families spend almost one-quarter of their income on child care — a ratio that is much higher than in other parts of the world. Compared to the other 34 member-countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Canada ranks last in funding for child care. Since 2014, child care costs in Canada have risen at three times the rate of inflation.

Student parents face particular barriers to accessing and completing postsecondary education, including lack of quality and affordable child care, absence of child-friendly spaces on campus, and academic schedules that are incongruous with the needs of parents and children.

To make affordable, accessible, and safe child care a reality for Canadian parents, including student parents, the federal government should build upon existing bilateral agreements with provinces and territories, and gradually boost funding for early learning and child care to at least one percent of GDP. The provision of public, universal child care — based on the principles of universality, high quality, and comprehensiveness — would help to ensure Canada's competitiveness by enabling parents, and especially women, to have a real choice to remain in the workforce, focus on their careers and, therefore, maximize their productivity within the Canadian economy.

⁸ Economic Impact of International Education in Canada - 2016 Update. Global Affairs Canada. <http://www.international.gc.ca/education/report-rapport/impact-2016/index.aspx?lang=eng>