

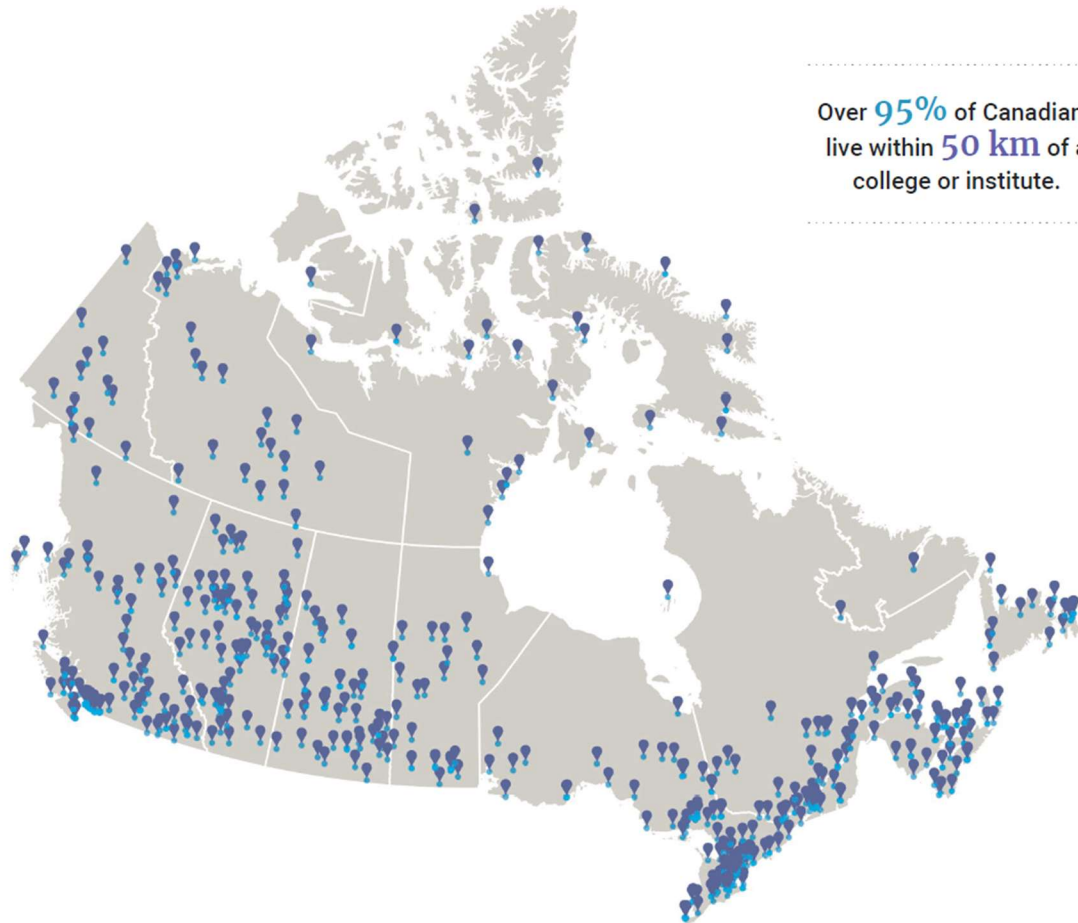


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Canada's Colleges and Institutes:

Restart, Recover, Build Back Better



Standing Committee on Finance

August 2020

Recommendations

1. Support reskilling/upskilling to get Canadians back to work and address employers' skills shortages.
2. Boost Canada's technical/trades training capacity by strengthening online delivery.
3. Meet current and future labour force needs by investing \$75M / three years to maintain Canada's competitive position as an international study destination and by facilitating transitions to the labour market and citizenship.
4. Empower SMEs, social, health and community organizations to restart the economy through a new investment of \$165M over two years in the NSERC College and Community Innovation Program (CCIP).
5. Support a green, inclusive recovery through a \$5B stimulus investment in college infrastructure, making campuses more sustainable and accessible, advancing innovation, and improving learning spaces for Indigenous students.
6. Accelerate sustainability initiatives at colleges and in communities by investing \$50M in a national network of sustainability offices.
7. Improve PSE access for vulnerable and low-income Canadians through: funding increases for Indigenous programs; extending special Canada Student Grants and Loans provisions; covering costs for computer equipment and internet access for online learning.
8. Increase Canada's commitment to international development to support skills training and applied research for climate change adaptation.

Introduction

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will not be fully understood for many years, yet governments at all levels must make choices in the coming months that chart our best course towards recovery. Colleges, institutes, cégeps and polytechnics¹ will play a crucial role in this recovery agenda, to restart the Canadian economy and move it towards a better future. CICan's recommendations reflect the best ways colleges can serve their communities, including industry and small business partners, social and health organizations, and most importantly, students – the labour force that will power our exit from the crisis and help us build back better.

As we envisage the recovery Canadians aspire to, CICan recommends a holistic approach grounded in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), setting social, economic, and environmental objectives to create the best possible future for all, leaving no one behind.

The vision of the SDGs – ending poverty, improving health and education, reducing inequality, spurring economic growth, tackling climate change and preserving our natural environment -- resonates strongly as we witness the pandemic's impact, anticipate long-term consequences, and consider how to become more resilient.

COVID-19 has widened inequality gaps, making the 2030 targets urgent reminders of the world we want to create. This brief provides eight recommendations to move Canada towards those targets, catalyzing the green shift needed for a sustainable, prosperous recovery.

Decent Work and Economic Growth

Building back better requires the right mix of labour market skills. The landscape was already challenging before the pandemic, with advances in technology threatening traditional employment and an aging population requiring that growth and services be maintained despite a smaller workforce. The luxury of time to address those challenges is now unavailable, with record unemployment in March and April and many employers uncertain they can retain staff.² People most impacted by job losses are among the most vulnerable: those with only a secondary school credential, women, and youth.³

To address skills and labour force challenges, Canada needs policy measures and investments that make reskilling/upskilling affordable and responsive to employers' needs, bolstered by robust capacity to deliver training online and increased immigration to support workforce growth.

Recommendation 1: Support reskilling and upskilling to get Canadians back to work and address employers' skills shortages through:

- *an accessible, responsive training allowance that adequately covers training and prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) costs;*
- *a renewed Employment Insurance (EI) program to increase access to training for unemployed, self-employed and gig workers;*
- *increased apprenticeship training and internship opportunities;*
- *green skills modules for technical/trades training to support climate change adaptation and mitigation in key industries.*

Colleges have a key role in education for employment, retraining Canadians for new jobs and upskilling to meet new demands in existing careers. Colleges are connected to local employers seeking responsive, short-term training options, including stackable micro-credentials, to ensure their employees, as well as self-employed and gig workers, develop the skills to obtain and maintain full and productive employment.

¹ References to "colleges" refer collectively to publicly-assisted colleges, institutes, polytechnics, cégeps.

² <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-626-x/11-626-x2020013-eng.htm>

³ <https://lmic-cimt.ca/job-loss-impacts-of-covid-19-by-education-gender-and-age/>

An enabling policy response and investments will ensure Canadians can access financial support through a redesigned Canada Training Benefit and an EI program renewed in consultation with employers, labour and PSE. To maximize efficiency, PLAR expenses must be eligible so previously acquired skills are recognized and training institutions can customize training that gets people back to work quickly.

Long-standing shortages in trades occupations require increased opportunities for apprenticeship training. Wage-subsidized internships, especially focused on digital skills and research, bring high value to youth and employers. To support a green shift, investments must integrate “green skills” for key sectors and occupations, increasing expertise in green technology and climate change mitigation practices, to adapt to risks of a changing environment.

Recommendation 2: Boost Canada's technical/trades training capacity by strengthening online delivery for college programs through:

- *\$1.4B to upgrade colleges' digital infrastructure, technology and cybersecurity systems; integrate simulation and virtual/augmented reality in hands-on courses; provide digital support services for student success;*
- *\$50M to develop over 1,000 shared online resources for technical/trades programs, available on a collaborative platform.*

The pandemic has fast-tracked the digital shift for learning and work. To effectively address the skills and training needs of Canadians and skills shortages, we need a post-secondary system equipped with the digital infrastructure to support anytime/anywhere learning through secure log-ins, and high-quality, interactive, synchronous and asynchronous participation by learners, faculty and staff. This includes self-serve digital services; device-agnostic connectivity; support for learners with varying degrees of digital literacy and new digital requirements for education and training programs. For colleges this also means integrating hands-on training requirements online, using simulation and virtual/augmented reality. Experts expect online delivery is here to stay, making this investment relevant to both short-term needs and the transformative changes that will maintain Canada's global leadership in technical and professional skills training.

Recommendation 3: Meet current and future labour force needs across the country by investing \$75M over three years to maintain Canada's competitive position as an international study destination and by facilitating student transitions to the labour market and citizenship.

Canada's colleges are attracting an increasing share of international students, with international enrolment increasing by more than 13,000 from 2015/16 to 2016/17,⁴ accounting for 43% of all post-secondary study permit holders in 2017.⁵ In 2018, international students contributed \$21.6B to Canada's GDP, supporting almost 170,000 jobs.⁶ Colleges in large urban centres and smaller/rural communities welcome international students, recognizing their potential to fill skills and labour shortages. The government's pandemic response has recognized the importance of international students to domestic and foreign policy goals. To achieve its recovery objectives, the government must build on previous investments in Canada's International Education Strategy by scaling and diversifying recruitment in key markets and facilitating transitions to permanent residency and citizenship to meet immigration targets.

⁴ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/181128/dq181128c-eng.htm>.

⁵ <https://cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/International-Students-in-Canada-ENG.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.international.gc.ca/education/strategy-2019-2024-strategie.aspx?lang=eng>

Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Recommendation 4: Empower SMEs, social, health and community organizations to restart the economy through a new investment of \$165M over two years in the NSERC College and Community Innovation Program (CCIP), with an option to extend this funding through the longer-term recovery:

- \$85M over two years for rapid-response and entry-level grants to improve or develop new products and services, including those involving technology adoption and green innovation.
- \$80M over two years for colleges to engage SMEs and other partners in applied research to support community recovery efforts.

Canada is a nation of SMEs that often lack the capacity, equipment and networks to undertake vigorous R&D. Mandated to contribute to economic development in their communities, colleges are gateways to the innovation ecosystem, developing innovative solutions to thousands of real-world challenges faced by business and community partners each year. To respond to the pandemic's fallout, applied research centres must boost their regional and sectoral presence, helping build stronger supply chains for essential goods and services. Mobilizing concrete solutions will help communities weather the pandemic, restore jobs and revitalize regional economies.

Many businesses and social and health organizations are turning to colleges for support to reopen safely, adapt their operations and develop products and services responsive to the new reality. To meet this demand and sustain capacity in future, applied research centres need flexible, nimble access to existing grant mechanisms, and funding increases to assist partners coping with revenue losses, lay-offs of key personnel and a changed and uncertain business environment that threatens their survival.

This recommendation aligns with that of the *College Applied Research Taskforce*, comprised of twelve national and provincial applied research stakeholders.

Recommendation 5: Support a green and inclusive recovery through a \$5B stimulus investment in college infrastructure to make campuses more sustainable and accessible, advance innovation and improve learning spaces for Indigenous students.

Recommendation 6: Accelerate sustainability initiatives at colleges and in communities by investing \$50M in a national network of sustainability offices.

Investing in PSE infrastructure upgrades and retrofits will provide stimulus to get Canadians back to work while boosting the capacity of colleges to meet employers' skills development needs, supporting innovation through applied research, and rebooting an inclusive, environmentally sustainable economy.

CICan's 2019 Survey of Infrastructure Needs identified over 300 shovel-ready projects valued at \$3.5B. Extrapolated, the total need is estimated at \$5B. The survey exposed a substantial backlog of deferred maintenance, mostly for renovations, repairs and making campuses more environmentally sustainable.

Support for college sustainability offices would empower institutions to collaborate with community partners and municipalities and infuse local labour markets with graduates equipped and committed to create zero carbon, diverse and resilient communities.

Reduced Inequalities

Recommendation 7: Improve access to PSE for vulnerable and low-income Canadians through: funding increases for Indigenous PSE programs; extending special Canada Student Loans and Grants provisions; and covering costs for computer equipment and internet access required for online learning.

COVID-19 has had the greatest impact on the most vulnerable in Canada and internationally, exposing inequalities within, and among countries.⁷ Over the last 30 years, inequality has grown in Canada, with the richest increasing their share of national income, while the poorest and middle-income groups' share has shrunk.⁸ The pandemic has underscored inequalities, as business, learning and socializing moved online, highlighting the necessity of being connected to the virtual world.

Canada's most vulnerable need more financial supports to access PSE, and training tools and connectivity to enable their transition into or return to employment. This is particularly challenging for Indigenous and rural Canadians given almost 60% of those in rural areas lack adequate access to high-speed internet.⁹ To reduce inequalities, investments to increase PSE access must be complemented by dramatic improvements to broadband, to support virtual learning and work during recovery.

Recommendation 8: Increase Canada's commitment to international development to support skills training and applied research for climate change adaptation.

Inequalities between countries have been exacerbated as measures to mitigate the pandemic have overwhelmed global health systems and caused businesses to shut down, severely impacting half the global workforce; this is expected to push tens of millions of people into extreme poverty and hunger.¹⁰ This will be compounded by the harsh impact of climate change on developing countries. Canada's colleges can help reduce these inequalities and address the impacts of climate change through increased international development efforts in skills training and research.

Conclusion

With their extensive reach across the country, colleges are uniquely positioned to support Canadians, companies and communities as the economy restarts and recovers. Emerging from the crisis requires a coordinated and courageous national response, leading to a more resilient, equitable, inclusive and sustainable Canada. Colleges across the country are ready to support these efforts by promoting inclusive social and economic development, increasing access to PSE and skills training for vulnerable Canadians, advancing reconciliation, and contributing to local, national and international efforts to tackle climate change.

⁷ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal10>

⁸ <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/Details/society/income-inequality.aspx?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>

⁹ <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/internet/internet.htm>

¹⁰ <https://undocs.org/en/E/2020/57>