

Pre-Budget Submission to the House of Commons  
Standing Committee on Finance

---

August 2020



## Recommendations

1. Improve telecommunications network infrastructure by accelerating federal efforts—in close partnership with municipalities, provinces and private partners—to expand High-Speed Internet capabilities to rural and remote areas.
2. Establish a 'Post-secondary Digital Transformation Fund' that would enable post-secondary institutions to:
  - a. Further expand and support online learning and experiential opportunities.
  - b. Support targeted programming associated with digital infrastructure and technology, aligned with industry and community needs.
3. Launch a 'Professoriate Pilot Program' to facilitate targeted attraction of global talent to Canada.
4. Continue to support international student mobility, including flexible visa processing and supplementary provision of funding enabling students to safely self-isolate upon arrival.
5. To fully leverage promising research and translate this into healthier communities, provide increased targeted funding for the domestic manufacturing and delivery of COVID-19 vaccines and treatments.
6. Bolster federal matching funding programs that support the identification and development of industry-university collaborations.
7. Invest in the creation of a Western Innovation Hub to connect industries that have been particularly impacted by COVID-19—including Agriculture and Oil and Gas—with the expertise and talent of post-secondary institutions and research institutes.
8. Stimulate economic recovery and employment in communities across Canada by creating a Post-Secondary Infrastructure Fund focused on the renewal and revitalization of sustainable and accessible infrastructure, scheduled for roll out this fiscal year.
9. Expand eligibility for COVID-19 economic support programs to include ancillary services at post-secondary institutions.

Canada's universities are integral to short and long-term economic and social recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, equipping our workforce with skills necessary to be successful and producing the innovative research outcomes that we need to rebuild. Building on the Government of Canada's significant investments in the health and safety of Canadians, the University of Alberta would like to suggest a number of next steps in service of driving economic growth, innovation and creativity across Canada.

## **ADAPTING TO THE NEW NORMAL**

### **ENHANCING DIGITAL RESILIENCY OF POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS**

The University of Alberta has responded to COVID-19 by fundamentally shifting learning delivery models, rapidly pivoting our research enterprises to support national and global efforts and supporting our local communities. However, as we adapt to this new reality and begin to re-open economies, we must be prepared to respond to further outbreaks.

The impact on Canada's workforce has been dramatic, with millions of unemployed, displaced or impacted workers across sectors (including the energy sector) needing new skills and education to navigate the current labour market. Demand for online and hybrid learning will continue to increase as these workers seek out accessible and safe opportunities for upskilling or reskilling necessary to succeed in a competitive digital economy.

Universities are already at the forefront of this digital transformation. To stay ahead, we need to further expand and support digital programming. However, meeting the scale and pace of these demands requires significant resources and upgrades to the IT infrastructure of institutions.

**Creation of a Post-secondary Digital Transformation Fund** would enable post-secondary institutions to further expand and support online and hybrid learning, experiential opportunities and targeted programming associated with digital infrastructure and technology, aligned with industry and community needs.

As COVID-19 disproportionately affects vulnerable groups, digital delivery and supporting infrastructure must be accessible to these communities across Canada, including in rural and remote areas. We recommend **improving telecommunications network infrastructure** by accelerating federal efforts—in close partnership with municipalities, provinces and private partners—to expand High-Speed Internet capabilities to rural and remote areas.

## **SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY FOR GLOBAL TALENT ATTRACTION AND RETENTION**

International mobility and collaboration opens doors to new knowledge and capital across sectors, cultivates deeper global trade relationships and builds a globally aware, internationally connected citizenry. This is even more pertinent in the context of COVID-19, as a global pandemic necessitates a continued global response.

Canada has met this challenge, rising in global competitive rankings due to our openness to the world.<sup>1</sup> However, the travel restrictions that have kept us safe have also put a strain on the flow of talent that we need to rebuild. Innovative solutions are needed to ensure our universities can safely attract and retain the expertise and capital of international students, staff and faculty.

We must seize this opportunity of unprecedented global collaboration. We recommend that the Government of Canada **launch a 'Professoriate Pilot Program'** to facilitate targeted attraction of global talent to Canada as well as **continue to support international student mobility**,

---

<sup>1</sup> IMD 2020 World Competitiveness Ranking, June 2020. As accessed at <https://www.imd.org/news/updates/IMD-2020-World-Competitiveness-Ranking-revealed/>

including flexible visa processing and provision of funding to enable students to safely self-isolate upon arrival to supplement the plans and programs universities have in place.

### **SHAPING THE FUTURE: RESEARCH AND INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS**

COVID-19 has shone a spotlight on the importance of a robust research and innovation ecosystem that is able to pivot to support pressing national and global efforts. Investments in scientific and social research at Canada's universities are now paying dividends, expanding Canada's knowledge base in areas including vaccine development, treatments and therapeutics.

University researchers have been on the front line, in large part due to existing and recent federal investments in research. For example, the Li Ka Shing Institute of Virology at the University of Alberta was set up in 2010 to be ready for global moments just like this. As a result, researchers were able to quickly turn their attention to COVID-19, building on existing research efforts to study COVID-19 impact, prevention and treatments.

Recognizing this momentum, we need to be prepared to manufacture a sufficient domestic supply of vaccine candidates and treatments. Additional federal re-investment is needed to leverage existing facility capacity in order to meet demand and facilitate effective community rollout. For example, the Alberta Cell Therapy Manufacturing (ACTM) facility at the University of Alberta has the capacity to potentially produce vaccine doses for millions of Canadians. To fully leverage these facilities, we recommend that the Government of Canada **provide increased targeted funding for the domestic manufacturing and delivery of vaccines and treatments.**

### **LEVERAGING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CROSS-SECTORAL ECOSYSTEM DEVELOPMENT**

Regional innovation ecosystems connect academic institutions to industry and community organizations, fostering the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and ideas, state of the art technical infrastructure and a steady flow of students and researchers with world-leading expertise and skills. These connections also allow for the expansion and creation of university programming that is nimble and responsive to employer and student demand.

In service of strengthened cross-sectoral ecosystem development to aid in economic recovery, we recommend that the Government of Canada **bolster existing federal matching funding programs to support the identification and development of industry-university collaborations.** In addition, to increase the pace of innovation adoption, we also recommend the **creation of a Western Innovation Hub** to connect industries that have been particularly impacted by COVID-19—including Agriculture and Oil and Gas—with the expertise and talent of post-secondary institutions and research institutes.

### **REINFORCING PLATFORMS FOR NATIONAL GROWTH**

#### **ENHANCING SUSTAINABLE AND ACCESSIBLE INFRASTRUCTURE**

Post-secondary infrastructure is one of the most effective ways to inject stimulus into a struggling economy and stimulate inclusive recovery during and beyond recessionary periods. As gathering places, community builders and test-beds for innovation, University campuses are well positioned to deliver shovel worthy and shovel ready projects of benefit to communities across Canada.

Previous programs like the Knowledge Infrastructure Program (KIP) and Post-Secondary Institutions Strategic Investment Fund (PSI-SIF) were effective in getting funds out the door and into the economy quickly. These programs have enhanced research and learning environments

and had significant long-term benefits for local economies and GHG emissions reduction. The University of Alberta was an effective steward of these federal infrastructure dollars, delivering projects on time and on budget.

However, aging facilities and systems continue to pose risks to university operations and sustainability. While the University of Alberta is taking action to rationalize our large campus footprint and accelerate the renewal and creative utilization of space, there is a pressing need for additional federal funding to assist in these efforts.

Additional investments in sustainable post-secondary infrastructure would enable the functional and physical renewal of campus infrastructure in a cost-efficient manner, minimizing the need for new buildings and addressing environmental realities while meeting the needs of today's learners and researchers.

Universities are ready to act quickly to deliver stimulus. We recommend the **creation of a dedicated post-secondary infrastructure fund** focused on the renewal and revitalization of sustainable and accessible infrastructure, scheduled for roll out this fiscal year. Recognizing the challenging financial situation facing provinces like Alberta, we would ask for flexibility in terms of matching requirements.

### **ANCILLARY SERVICES**

Post-secondary ancillary services are self-funded units that support core institutional teaching and research functions, including residence and dining services, parking and more. While normally able to generate revenue sufficient to cover operating expenses and maintenance costs, they have been directly impacted by economic downturns due to COVID-19. However, they are also ineligible for many federal COVID-19 support programs.

In order to ensure these units can continue to deliver high-quality and affordable services to our communities, we recommend that the Government of Canada **expand eligibility for COVID-19 economic support programs**—like the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy—to include post-secondary ancillary services.