



Julia Douglas, Committee Clerk
99 Wellesley Street West
Room 1405, Whitney Block
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A2

January 24th, 2020

Dear Julia Douglas,

The members of the College Student Alliance (CSA) are pleased to be given the opportunity to participate in the Government of Ontario's ongoing conversation with the public regarding the preparation of the 2020 Ontario Budget.

CSA is a member-driven advocacy organization that proudly advocates on behalf of college students across Ontario. CSA seeks to strengthen Ontario's college system for students in the areas of accessibility, accountability, affordability, quality, and transferability.

The following submission is a direct result of ongoing discussions within the CSA membership. Our members have created recommendations to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, which, if acted upon, have great potential to improve the lives of Ontario's college students. These benefits focus on increasing funds dedicated to the mental health of post-secondary students, providing students with sufficient financial aid, preventing sexual violence on post-secondary campuses, and ensuring food security for all students in Ontario.

By adopting our recommendations, you will be strengthening Ontario's post-secondary education system while growing the province's highly skilled workforce.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jecema', is positioned above the printed name and title.

Jecema Hewitt-Vasil
President, College Student Alliance
303 – 372 Richmond Street West
Toronto, ON M5V 1X6





SUPPORTING ONTARIO'S INNOVATORS

COLLEGE STUDENT ALLIANCE

2020 Pre-Budget Submission

WHO WE ARE

College Student Alliance is a non-profit, member-driven organization that represents nearly 55,000 college students across Ontario in partnership with 10 student associations. We perform research and advocacy on post-secondary issues, work in collaboration with post-secondary and governmental stakeholders, and provide a unified voice on-behalf of college students in Ontario. Our goal is to support and improve the college experience through our pillars: affordability, accessibility, accountability, transferability, and quality.

INTRODUCTION

Continuous technological innovation and emerging industries require an adaptive and responsive workforce and economy. The increasing amount of jobs involving new technologies and advanced technical skills puts colleges at the forefront of Ontario's skilled workforce, as colleges respond directly to labour market demands through innovative and skills-oriented programs. College students and graduates are then an integral part of the success of Ontario's economy and future.

Over the years, the college student population of Ontario has transformed and grown significantly. The amount of international students at Ontario colleges has increased by 300% since 2012, and the amount of college applicants who are not coming directly from high school is steadily increasing, meaning that many college students are undergoing career changes or have families of their own.¹ College students come from a wide range of backgrounds and fields with different needs and strengths, while the college experience is simultaneously becoming more complex. For many students, attending college comes along with significant social, emotional, and mental distress and financial instability, of which are often not met with adequate resources or supports.

As our college students work through these challenges and continue to drive our workforce and economy forward by advancing their skills and pursuing new industries, we must ensure they have access to adequate resources and supports that they need. CSA's 2020 Pre-Budget submission outlines ways in which college students could be better supported to meet the demands of tomorrow's economy.

The following are CSA's recommendations to the provincial government for the 2020 Budget:

1. The provincial government should dedicate \$75 million, of the \$1.9 billion in mental health funding, to services for post-secondary students over 3 years.
2. The provincial government should renew the funding for the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health to ensure they can continue supporting post-secondary institutions in addressing students' mental health needs.
3. The provincial government should reinstate the previous OSAP funding model and provide more Ontario Student Grants for low-income students.
4. The provincial government should create a specific unit within the Ministry of Colleges and Universities for the prevention of sexual violence on post-secondary campuses.
5. The provincial government should provide funding and resources for food security programs on campuses to ensure that students in need have access to nutritional food.

¹ (Colleges Ontario, 2019; Ministry of Colleges and Universities, 2019)

MENTAL HEALTH

Recommendation 1: The provincial government should dedicate \$75 million, of the \$1.9 billion in mental health funding, to services for post-secondary students over 3 years

More than half of college students in Ontario struggle with mental health issues, yet they are not referenced within mental health strategies and legislation.² While the Ontario government invested \$174 million this year into improving Ontario's mental health services, there was no funding allocated for mental health supports for post-secondary students. Post-secondary students are at a higher risk of developing mental health disorders, as most mental health disorders arise between 15 – 24 years of age.³ The National College Health Assessment determined this year that 51% of students in Canada felt “so depressed in the previous year it was difficult for them to function” and 69% of students reported experiencing overwhelming anxiety, of which has increased since 2016.⁴ Post-secondary institutions are struggling to meet the growing demands for mental health services on their campuses with insufficient funding from the provincial government, which results in delays and services gaps in mental health support for students. The cost of mental health services was \$206 million for colleges during the 2015-16 school year, of which only \$45 million was provided by the provincial government.⁵ Additionally, mental health services on campuses are often limited and do not adequately accommodate the specific needs of underrepresented groups (e.g. LGBTQ+ and minority groups).⁶ Dedicating funding for mental health services at post-secondary institutions could help institutions provide more effective and responsive services to students without having to sacrifice funding from institutional operations or academic programming. We would argue that the incidence of mental health disorders in post-secondary students signals the need for the prioritization of students in mental health legislation, strategies, and funding.

Investing in the mental health of post-secondary students will help support Ontario's skilled workforce and economy and will offset Ontario's mental health spending. The cost of mental health services in Canada is currently \$51 billion, of which \$3.1 billion is spent by Ontario.⁷ Providing more mental health support, interventions, and preventative care to post-secondary students can produce cost benefits by offsetting future expenditures in mental illness treatment and accommodations, while also improving student retention.⁸ A healthier student population will contribute to the province's skilled workforce and the economy.

This recommendation would cost \$75 million.

2 (Holmes & Silvestri, 2016)

3 (Kessler, Chiu, Demler, & Walters, 2005)

4 (American College Health Association, 2016)

5 (Deloitte LLP and affiliated entities., 2017)

6 (Jaworska, De Somma, Fonseka, Heck, & MacQueen, 2016)

7 (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2013)

8 (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2011; Kognito, 2015)

Recommendation 2: The provincial government should renew the funding for the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health to ensure they can continue supporting post-secondary institutions in addressing students' mental health needs

The Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (CICMH) is a unique cross-sector partnership that was launched in 2013 as a part of Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, Open Minds, Healthy Minds to address mental health on campuses in Ontario.

The Centre works tirelessly with all 44 campuses and over 100 community partners to seek innovative ways to promote systemic responses to existing and emerging mental health issues that impact post-secondary students. It also provides opportunities for the sharing and creation of common resources and best practices to avoid duplication. Furthermore, it efficiently delivers these resources in their role as a centralized hub.

In the past year, CICMH has greatly increased its contribution to the sector through a number of ways:

- Increased one-on-one consultations with campuses on issues related to campus mental health.
- Creation of 21 new morefeetontheground.ca videos to promote ways non-clinical staff can recognize, respond to and refer students to campus supports. These videos have had over 2,644 views since June.
- Over 3,500 individuals taking the morefeetontheground.ca course and an increase of 13% of the morefeetinthrgoun.ca website.
- The launch of two new toolkits: Stepped Care 2.0 and Campus Community Partnerships to provide comprehensive guidance to leaders looking to implement these models. Two other toolkits will be launched early in the new year.
- The certification of CICMH staff in Mental Health Works programming, thus enabling them to provide training on Traumatic Stress and Compassion Fatigue to stakeholders. This is a key issue campuses are struggling with, as identified by our regional forums.
- Facilitating five Regional Forums since April 2019, which have seen a total of 139 participants.

Despite the considerable achievements CICMH has made in campus mental health, there is still much more progress to be made. As they work on a new strategic plan, CICMH has identified a number of new areas of work including translation research into best practices and supporting the creation of tools and programs. CICMH has made an invaluable contribution to campus mental health in Ontario, and we would argue that renewing CICMH's funding would be an investment in not only the mental health services at colleges and universities, but in the students who rely on them.

ONTARIO STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Recommendation 3: The provincial government should reinstate the previous OSAP funding model and provide more Ontario Student Grants for low-income students

Post-secondary education is an essential asset for the majority of Ontarians. The increasingly competitive Ontario labour market requires an adaptive and skilled workforce, as every sector now employs 25% less young adults without a degree.⁹ However, a post-secondary education has become less-affordable over the years, as the cost has risen dramatically and outpaced the rate of inflation by nearly 300% in Canada.¹⁰ In Ontario, post-secondary education is particularly costly with tuition rates being the second highest in Canada, yet provincial spending per student is the lowest out of all the provinces.¹¹ The 33% budget cut to OSAP in the previous year has further implicated the affordability of post-secondary education in Ontario by making access to the program and available funding more limited.

With a funding model that is more loans-based than grants-based, OSAP will force students to take on more debt with limited available grants. More debt could cause the loan default rate, which is currently 10.9% for college graduates, to rise and put more students at risk of financial instability.¹² Studies show that graduates with more student debt have lower net worth, less home equity, and lack the ability to accumulate assets when compared to graduates without student debt.¹³ The OSAP budget cut could discourage students from pursuing post-secondary education who are more loan-averse, prevent low-income students from accessing a post-secondary education altogether, and force current students without financial stability to dropout or delay their education.¹⁴ Nearly half of all college students in Ontario earn less than \$60,000 a year, many of whom are mature students with dependents, which means that many college students in Ontario are now struggling to finance their education while supporting their families.¹⁵ The recent cuts to OSAP could jeopardize the development of Ontario's skilled workforce, which would then have a detrimental and long-lasting effect on the economy.

Returning OSAP to the previous grants-based funding model will prevent the increase of student debt, allow students to complete their education, and allow students to become financially stable after graduation. More Ontario Student Grants could also improve access to post-secondary education for low-income families and under-represented groups, which will then strengthen the skilled work-force of Ontario and help boost the economy.

This recommendation would cost approximately \$600 million - \$675 million.

9 (Colleges Ontario, 2018)

10 (Royal Bank of Canada, 2018)

11 (Usher, 2019)

12 (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2016)

13 (Zhan, Xiang, & Elliott, 2016)

14 (Palameta & Voyer, 2010)

15 (Colleges Ontario, 2019)

SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION ON CAMPUSES

Recommendation 4: The provincial government should create a specific unit within the Ministry of Colleges and Universities for the prevention of sexual violence on post-secondary campuses

Sexual violence is an ongoing prevalent issue on post-secondary campuses that requires constant attention and support, as 1 in 5 women will experience sexual violence during their post-secondary education.¹⁶ According to a study released this year by the provincial government, 49.6% of students on Ontario college campuses have experienced some form of sexual violence.¹⁷ Previous governments have made great strides in working with post-secondary stakeholders to develop sexual violence prevention frameworks, specifically with the creation of the College Sector Sexual Assault Task Force in 2014 and the Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan Act (Bill 132) in 2016, which resulted in many improvements to sexual violence prevention policies, especially on post-secondary campuses. All post-secondary institutions now have stand-alone sexual violence prevention policies that were created with student input.

While the creation of these institutional policies is a crucial step in the right direction that signals the prioritization of sexual violence prevention on campuses, it is unclear whether they have had a meaningful impact on sexual violence at post-secondary campuses or if they adequately meet provincial standards. Each institutional policy differs fundamentally, which provides room for insufficiencies, loopholes, and reporting errors. In 2017, the Student Society of McGill University found that many post-secondary sexual violence policies contain several inadequacies, which included gag orders, a lack in rape shield protections, and limited recognition of intersectionality.¹⁸ Inadequacies in sexual violence policies can make survivors of sexual violence more vulnerable, prevent access to supports for survivors with specific needs, and make the reporting process more difficult. There should be further government oversight from a specific unit within the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to ensure that all sexual violence prevention policies at PSE institutions are comprehensive and effective.¹⁹

A specific unit within the ministry for the prevention of sexual violence on campuses could provide government monitoring and guidance to ensure that all sexual violence policies and programs are locally-relevant, consistent, and effective within the framework of the Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan Act (2016).²⁰ By working with institutions, the ministry can help ensure that institutional sexual violence policies are comprehensive, yet also locally-relevant.

The cost of this recommendation would be \$2 million – \$4 million.

16 (Canadian Federation of Students Ontario, 2015)

17 (CCI Research Inc, 2019)

18 (Student Society of McGill University, 2017)

19 (Alliance of BC Students, et al., 2018)

20 (Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2017)

FOOD SECURITY

Recommendation 5: The provincial government should provide funding and resources for food security programs on campuses to ensure that students in need have access to nutritional food

Food insecurity is a multi-faceted issue that has a direct impact on not only one's physical well-being, but also mental health and academic achievement. With high tuition rates and limited student grants, Ontario college students are seeing heightened financial pressures that impact their access to quality and nutritional food. In 2018, over a quarter of college students in Ontario reported household incomes of less than \$30,000, while nearly half reported incomes less than \$60,000.²¹ While the amount of mature students continues to increase, many of whom have dependents, financial instability puts them and their families especially at risk of food insecurity.

In Ontario, the average college student is not consuming the Canadian Food Guide's recommended servings of fruits and vegetables, of which would help to prevent the risk of heart disease, stroke, and some types of cancers.²² According to the National College Health Assessment, only 8.6% of Ontario students are consuming the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables per day, while 5.6% are not consuming any fruits and vegetables per day.²³ Food available on campuses is often too expensive or not sufficient in quality or nutrients, often forcing students to rely on fast-food alternatives. Surveys at Ontario campuses have revealed that only 45% of students are satisfied with food options and that 61% find these food options too expensive.²⁴ It is evident that college students in Ontario are grossly undernourished, have limited healthy food options, and are in serious need of increased access to quality and nutritious food.

Many students rely on campus food banks and food programs to supplement their diets; last year 16.3% of food bank visits were from individuals age 18 – 30.²⁵ However, campus food banks often struggle to meet the demands of students due to limited resources of nutrient-sufficient foods.²⁶ A nation-wide study found that campus food banks do not provide a healthful diet to students who rely on them and that more attention and resources should be directed to the dietary intake of post-secondary students.²⁷ Since the Fall semester of 2019, campus food banks in Ontario have seen resources and funding further decreased due to the Student Choice Initiative, which made fees for campus food banks optional.

More funding and resources should be directed to supporting campus food banks to ensure they can meet the needs of their students. Providing food banks with sufficient resources will increase accessibility to nutritious food and help reduce food insecurity on Ontario campuses. A complete diet will also support the physical and mental health of our college students, and help them to achieve academic success.

21 (Colleges Ontario, 2019)

22 (Heart and Stroke Foundation, 2013)

23 (American College Health Association, 2016)

24 (Maynard, Lahey, & Abraham, 2018; Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario, 2013)

25 (Food Banks Canada, 2019)

26 (Silverthorn, 2016)

27 (Jessri, Abedi, Wong, & Eslamian, 2014)

CONCLUSION

College students are at the forefront of Ontario's transforming economy, of which requires constant innovation and skills advancement. We have outlined numerous challenges that college students face and ways in which they could be better supported to overcome these challenges, such as increased access to Ontario Student Grants, increased funding for mental health resources on campuses, improved sexual violence prevention policies, and increased resources to address food insecurity. Our 2020 Pre-Budget recommendations demonstrate ways in which the provincial government can invest not only in the college student population of Ontario, but in the prosperity of Ontario's economy. CSA welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with the Ministry of Finance and the Standing Committee on Financial and Economic Affairs to build progress for Ontario together by supporting Ontario's college student population and skilled workforce.

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372 RICHMOND STREET WEST, SUITE 303
TORONTO, ON M5V 1X6

www.collegestudentalliance.ca
