



# RESILIENT STUDENTS PROMISING FUTURES

2022 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

**COLLEGE STUDENT ALLIANCE**

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## WHO WE ARE

College Student Alliance (CSA) is a non-profit, member-driven organization that represents over 47,000 college students across Ontario in partnership with 5 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

College students are a driving force for innovation and economic prosperity in Ontario, as colleges serve as community hubs that respond to industry advancements and labour demands. The college student population in Ontario has become increasingly diverse over the years, coming from a wide range of backgrounds, fields, and life stages, and with varying levels of need. Since 2012, the amount of international students at Ontario colleges has increased by 300 percent, 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<sup>1,2</sup>.

The increasingly complex college student experience has been further complicated by the pandemic, which has created a wide range of new obstacles for college students to overcome: increased financial instability, negative mental health, obstacles with online learning, and labour market challenges. Despite this, our college students are continuing to persevere and adapt to this isolating learning environment.

As our college students work through these new challenges and continue to drive our workforce and economy forward, we must ensure they have a wide range of resources to support them throughout their learning journey. CSA's 2022 Pre-Budget Recommendations outline ways in which college students could be better supported in order to overcome the challenges presented by the pandemic, and to go on to succeed in their careers and contribute to Ontario's economic development.

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<sup>1</sup> Colleges Ontario, 2020

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Colleges and Universities, 2019b

# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

## AFFORDABILITY OF EDUCATION

The provincial government should increase non-repayable OSAP grants and eliminate the expected individual, spousal, and parental contributions to OSAP funding for low and middle- income students.

The provincial government should improve the transparency and effectiveness of the Student Access Guarantee (SAG) by: amending guidelines to mandate excess funds are directly applied to the following year; amending the assessment tool to include indirect costs; and updating the OSAP estimator to introduce students to the SAG program.

The provincial government should reinstate an OSAP payment moratorium and two-year grace period, and increase OSAP expenditures to compensate for recent cuts.

## STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

The provincial government should increase funding for campus-based mental health services and supports, including a dedicated proportional increase of 9 percent to previously committed \$26.25 million funding that aligns with the Mental Health Strategy of Canada's recommendations, and ensures the delivery of culturally- and racially-relevant virtual and in-person mental health supports.

The provincial government should revise its postsecondary education strategy to include health coverage as a priority.

## ACCESSIBILITY OF VIRTUAL LEARNING

The provincial government should provide funding in the amount of a \$500 technology relief benefit for students who do not have appropriate technology for their online classes.

The government should fast-track their plans for expanding CRTC-recommended 50/10 Mbps internet access in rural and remote areas, with a focus on reserves, to reduce the barriers students in these areas face in accessing reliable internet for online classes.

The province should continue to invest in expanding online Open Education Resources (OER) to ensure students can access their reading materials.

The provincial government should also double its investment in virtual learning infrastructure from \$21.4 million to \$42.8 million to ensure that students across the province, particularly those in rural and northern communities, have access to high quality learning regardless of their proximity to campus.

The provincial government should also reaffirm its \$90 million investment over three years earmarked for the purchase of modern equipment for postsecondary institutions.

## **HOUSING INSECURITY**

The provincial government should implement measures to ensure that students have access to quality, affordable housing options across the province, including stricter regulation of landlords, the creation of a student housing Advisory Committee, and collaboration with municipalities to expand authorized residential units.

The provincial government should collaborate with stakeholders to bolster the communication of housing information on rights and responsibilities for student tenants by developing standardized landlord communication guidelines, collaborating with provincial stakeholders to better communicate tenant rights, mandate municipalities create strict bylaws targeting high-occupancy tenancies, and creating a province-wide public database of landlords.

The provincial government should implement measures that improve dispute and resolution pathways to provide faster, timely, and cost-effective processes, including increasing the number of LTB adjudicators, conducting an official inquiry into LTB delays, and establishing a central complaints and claims process.

## **INDIGENOUS STUDENT SUPPORTS**

The government should increase OSAP bursary amounts for Indigenous students, and commit to investing in the maintenance and expansion of Indigenous student services at colleges.

The provincial government should expand funding and access to traditionally underfunded initiatives, including the Indigenous Student Bursary program.

## **INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SUPPORTS**

The provincial government should provide \$1000 tuition relief benefit for international students with demonstrated financial need.

The provincial government should implement a tuition freeze for international students.

The provincial government should commit to increasing the base operating grant fund for Ontario colleges to reduce the burden of covering operational costs on international students.

# AFFORDABILITY OF EDUCATION

**Recommendation 1:** The provincial government should enhance OSAP to ensure affordability of education for Ontario's college students.



College students in Ontario are facing an unprecedented financial situation in which many are struggling to afford necessities and education costs with dwindling financial support from the government and limited employment opportunities. In a recent CSA student survey, over 60 percent of respondents indicated that COVID-19 has significantly impacted their ability to fund their education, and nearly 50 percent indicated that they are having a decreased ability to afford rent<sup>3</sup>. According to Statistics Canada, the majority of post-secondary students reported they were very or extremely concerned about: paying for tuition next term (51 percent), increasing their student debt (54 percent), and paying for current expenses (51 percent)<sup>4</sup>.

**60%**  
of students reported that COVID-19 significantly impacted their ability to fund their education.

COVID-19 is exacerbating the financial concerns that college students were experiencing before the pandemic began. As the 2019-20 school year unfolded, OSAP funding was scaled back \$670 million by the Ontario government<sup>5</sup> to reportedly prioritize the program's sustainability, leading to 24,000 fewer students receiving OSAP funding<sup>6</sup>. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Ontario's colleges the following year, the provincial government cut an additional \$400 million from its OSAP funding, from \$1.29 billion to \$895 million<sup>7</sup>. To qualify for the current OSAP funding model, students and their families are expected to contribute more to their education while receiving fewer grants, less funding overall, and accumulating more debt<sup>8</sup>. Consistent cuts to OSAP funding have contributed to the fact that Ontario government grants, tuition-relief funding, and per FTE student expenditures are the lowest, proportionally, in the country<sup>9</sup>. These

<sup>3</sup> College Student Alliance, 2020

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada, 2020c; Statistics Canada, 2020d; Statistics Canada, 2020e.

<sup>5</sup> CBC News, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Ontario Newsroom, 2019; OUSA, 2021a.

<sup>7</sup> The Queen's Journal, 2021; OUSA, 2021; Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2021a; Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Usher, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Usher, 2020.

financial challenges are being worsened by the pandemic, which has decreased the opportunities for students to work and save up funds during the summer to pay for their education.

CSA represents many low-income students, with 25 percent of Ontario's college students making less than \$30,000 per year and nearly 50 percent making less than \$60,000<sup>10</sup>. Our members are particularly disadvantaged by the funding cuts to OSAP, with many reporting significant reductions to their student financial aid in comparison to previous years.

“

I am extremely concerned in regards to my finances. Due to my parents income, I qualify for \$0 of OSAP, but, they do not help me in anyway shape or form financially.

I am doing my best to work as much as possible while taking 6 courses but it gets hard to balance things. Now, I will be working even less due to in person classes, and I have the added expense of commuting.”

- current first year Business student

Low-income students are expected to contribute at least \$3,600 towards their education, which was increased by 20 percent last year, in addition to expected parental and spousal contributions<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, OSAP calculations do not account for additional financial obligations of students and their families, including food and living expenses, which will be exacerbated this year with the added pressures of the pandemic.

**To provide immediate financial relief to students, the province should: increase non-repayable grants for students needing additional financial assistance before and during their post-secondary education<sup>12</sup>; eliminate expected contributions from students, spouses, and parents from OSAP calculations<sup>13 14</sup>; reinstate a moratorium on OSAP payments and interest accrual until March 31<sup>st</sup> 2023 to match the Federal government's commitment<sup>15 16</sup>, and following graduation, introduce a permanent, two-year OSAP grace period to ensure new graduates are able to manage their debt loads<sup>17</sup>.**

**To provide long-term financial support for students, the province needs to align its planned program spending growth (currently 1.5 percent) to match the rapid growth in demand factors (currently 3 percent), which includes rising college enrolment and price inflation<sup>18</sup>. The province should increase OSAP expenditures to help students recover the \$600 million initially cut from OSAP in 2019 prior to the pandemic<sup>19</sup>. The total investment of \$1.4 billion in 2021-22, and total of \$1.9 billion in 2022-23, would then bring the total investment closer to the previous \$2 billion invested in 2018-19<sup>20</sup>.**

**In addition, to help increase access to existing services, the province should improve transparency and effectiveness of the Student Access Guarantee (SAG), through: amending guidelines to mandate that excess funds from the tuition allocated program at each college**

<sup>10</sup> Colleges Ontario, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Ontario Government, n/d.

<sup>12</sup> OUSA, 2020b

<sup>13</sup> Alliance of BC Students et al, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> OUSA, 2020b

<sup>15</sup> Government of Canada, 2022a.

<sup>16</sup> OUSA, 2020b.

<sup>17</sup> Alliance of BC Students et al, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> FAO, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> McMackon, 2021; OUSA, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2021.

**be directly applied to the following year; amending the SAG assessment tool to include indirect costs (eg cost of rent, food), and take into account limited student employment income; and updating the OSAP estimator to introduce the SAG to students and expand awareness of the program.<sup>21</sup>**

If enacted, these recommendations would help support college students against the financial challenges presented by COVID-19 so they can continue to excel in their education and in their future careers.

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<sup>21</sup> OUSA, 2020.

## STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

**Recommendation 2: The provincial government should increase funding for culturally and racially-relevant mental health supports and services, and revise its postsecondary education strategy to include student health coverage as a priority.**



College students in Ontario are dealing with increased financial, employment, academic, and personal challenges resulting from the pandemic, which has contributed to their increased negative mental health over the past 18 months<sup>22</sup>. Post-secondary students are at a higher risk of developing mental health disorders<sup>23</sup>, as those aged 15 to 24 are the most likely of any age group to experience mental health disorders<sup>24</sup>. During the pandemic, 53 percent of students reported feeling so depressed that it impacted their daily function, and 69 percent of students reported experiencing overwhelming anxiety<sup>25</sup>.

**69%**  
of students reported  
experiencing  
overwhelming anxiety

However, post-secondary institutions are struggling to meet the growing demands for mental health services on their campuses due to insufficient provincial funding<sup>26 27</sup>, which results in delays and service gaps for mental health support for students<sup>28</sup>. Ontario's per student expenditure is the lowest in the country<sup>29</sup>, and over the last decade, Ontario government transfers to colleges have declined by 1 percent<sup>30</sup>. In 2017, colleges spent \$206 million on mental health programming, of which only 21 percent was funded by the

<sup>22</sup> Patterson et al, 2021; Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance et al, 2020;

<sup>23</sup> Patterson et al, 2021.

<sup>24</sup> Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, et al., 2020; CAMH, 2022.

<sup>25</sup> Patterson et al, 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Usher, A., 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Deloitte, 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Usher, A., 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Usher, A., 2020.

provincial government<sup>31</sup>. In addition, mental health services on campuses are often limited and do not adequately accommodate the specific needs of underrepresented groups, including LGBTQ+ and BIPOC students.<sup>32 33</sup>

Recent research has shown that students are both more likely to perform well academically and remain with their institution if they have access to on-campus counselling services<sup>34</sup>. Furthermore, investing in mental health of post-secondary students will help support Ontario's skilled workforce and economy and will offset Ontario's mental health spending.

“

I am anxious and stressed out with the decision...of returning to school for Winter 2022. I experience severe migraines most of the time and my travel time is four hours each day.

I am not sure how I will be able to concentrate on my studies knowing I have severe migraines and high chance of being exposed to COVID.

”

- Current fourth year Business student

Currently, the cost of mental health & addictions programming in Ontario is \$2.2 billion, just under 3 percent of total healthcare funding (\$74.1 billion) for 2021-22. Given that the projected cost of mental illness in Canada is \$79.9 billion<sup>35</sup> and that 70 percent of Ontario's 907,650 college students are reporting increased negative mental health outcomes during the pandemic<sup>36</sup>, the current underfunding for mental health programming presents a substantial economic cost for Ontario's economy.

**Building on the total \$26.25 million invested in 2021<sup>37</sup> for culturally relevant and diverse campus**

**mental health programs and initiatives, the government should invest an additional \$2.36 million in postsecondary mental health supports;** a proportional increase in funding that follows the Mental Health Strategy for Canada's recommended mental health spending at 9 percent for 2022<sup>38 39</sup>, as shown in Table 1.

**In addition, the provincial government should revise its postsecondary education strategy to include health coverage for students as a priority.**

As part of the \$3.8 billion earmarked over the next 10 years by the province<sup>40 41</sup>, this investment in mental health support, interventions, and preventative care to post-secondary students would generate substantial benefits by offsetting future expenditures in mental illness treatment and accommodations, while also improving student retention<sup>42</sup> and mental health, which ultimately provides for a healthier workforce of trained graduates that will help support and strengthen Ontario's economic recovery.

<sup>31</sup> Deloitte, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Jaworska, et al., 2016

<sup>33</sup> Deloitte, 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Patterson et al, 2021.

<sup>35</sup> CMHA, 2021.

<sup>36</sup> College Student Alliance, 2020.

<sup>37</sup> The Queen's Printer, 2021h.

<sup>38</sup> CMHA, 2021.

<sup>39</sup> OUSA, 2021a.

<sup>40</sup> The Queen's Printer, 2021a.

<sup>41</sup> OUSA, et al., 2020.

<sup>42</sup> MHCC, 2011; Kognito, 2015.

**Table 1: Postsecondary Institution Investment Breakdown<sup>43</sup>**

<b>Program/Initiative</b>	<b>2019-20 Funding Amount (Actual) in Millions (CAD)</b>	<b>2021-22 Funding Amount (Proposed) in Millions (CAD)</b>
Good2Talk/Allo j'écoute	5.16	5.62
CICMH, with earmarked amount (9%) to ensure tri-annual evaluations on existing on-campus programs & online mental health resources and wellness apps	0.5	0.55
Mental Health Worker Grant, with earmarked amount (9%) for PSIs to recruit and hire diverse front-line campus-based mental health workers	4.45	4.85
Mental Health Services Grant, with earmarked amount for mental health programming and resources that focus on building resiliency skills and promote mental health prevention	6	6.54
Indigenous Institutes Mental Health Grant	0.5	0.55
Mandate institution-based mental health care providers receive training on EDI counselling	N/A	
Get-A-head	0.25	0.27
Develop Partnerships & Greater Access to MH resources	2.39	2.61
Additional Allocation for Mental Health Programs and Resources from 2021 Budget <sup>44</sup>	7	7.63
<b>Total</b>	<b>26.25</b>	<b>28.61</b>

<sup>43</sup> The Queen's Printer, 2020.<sup>44</sup> The Queen's Printer, 2021a.

## ACCESSIBILITY OF VIRTUAL LEARNING

**Recommendation 3: The provincial government should fast-track internet access roll-out plans for rural and remote communities, with a focus on reserves; increase investments in these services to ensure they are affordable for households and communities; and subsidize a technology benefit for students in need.**



Since the pandemic has forced many schools, businesses, and institutions to transition to an online capacity, an internet connection has become an essential part of daily life<sup>45</sup>. The majority of college classes continue to be facilitated through video conferencing for this school year, which presents significant barriers to education. Virtual learning, as a method of course delivery, presents access barriers that disproportionately affect Indigenous students, as well as students in rural and remote areas. As students move into the Winter 2022 term, they will continue to require the necessary materials and technology needed to fully participate in online classes.

**69.5%**

of rural & remote households without access to high-speed internet

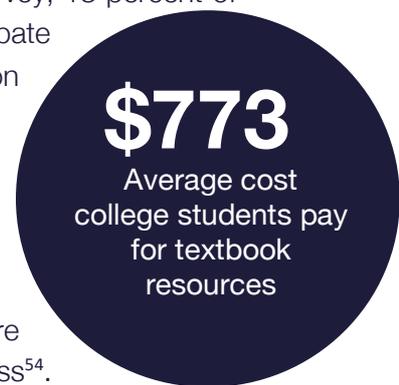
However, there is a significant number of college students in Ontario who still do not have the necessary technology and internet connection they need to fully participate in their education. While the majority of households in Ontario (87 percent) have access to 50/10 Mbps internet, cited by Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission as the minimum internet service that all Canadians should have access to,<sup>46</sup> only 30.5 percent of rural households have

<sup>45</sup> Queen's Printer of Ontario, 2021g.

<sup>46</sup> CRTC, 2020.

access to this basic internet speed, and on First Nations reserves only 16 percent of households have access.<sup>47</sup> Indigenous students make up 25 percent of the northern colleges' student population, and roughly 15 percent of college students live in rural communities, therefore, a significant proportion of Ontario college students do not have access to the minimum standard for internet connection in Canada<sup>48</sup>. Lacking internet connection is a significant barrier to a student's full participation and success in their post-secondary education, as previous studies have shown<sup>49</sup>, especially given that the majority of college students (55 percent) reported that they are continuing their studies in Winter 2022 with virtual learning components<sup>50</sup>.

Even for those students who do have a high-speed internet connection, many do not have the proper technology to use it. Approximately one in four Canadian households in lower-income categories use smartphones as their primary source of internet access, while over half of all Canadian households have less than one device per household member<sup>51</sup>. In a recent CSA student survey, 13 percent of respondents indicated that they do not have the appropriate technology to participate in their classes, including either computers, internet, or software<sup>52</sup>. In addition to internet and technology access barriers, students are also facing increased difficulty in affording their textbooks, which have become more difficult to obtain in the era of online learning. During the year, students pay on average \$773 towards their required textbooks, however students now have decreased resources to go toward purchasing their reading materials<sup>53</sup>. The continued expansion of Open Education Resources (OER) would alleviate these costs, ensure students can access their reading materials, and support student academic success<sup>54</sup>.



**To better address technology affordability and access, the province should provide a \$500 technology relief benefit for the 13 percent<sup>55</sup> of the college student population who do not have access to technology, costing \$32million, and continue to invest in expanding online Open Education Resources (OER).**

To address barriers to internet access, in March 2021, the Ontario government announced its \$4 billion plan to connect every region of Ontario with high-speed internet by the end of 2025<sup>56</sup> <sup>57</sup>. While CSA acknowledges this ambitious plan, students most heavily impacted by the pandemic need immediate support now in order to succeed in their virtual learning environments. **The province should work closely with the federal government to ensure that students, particularly from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and from rural and northern settings, are prioritized in the rollout of this broadband internet investment<sup>58</sup>.**

<sup>47</sup> CRTC 2020.

<sup>48</sup> Colleges Ontario, 2020.

<sup>49</sup> Hansen & Reich, 2015.

<sup>50</sup> CSA, 2022.

<sup>51</sup> StatsCan, 2020a.

<sup>52</sup> College Student Alliance, 2020.

<sup>53</sup> Brown, 2018

<sup>54</sup> Jhangjani, 2018

<sup>55</sup> College Student Alliance, 2020

<sup>56</sup> Queen's Printer of Ontario, 2021f.

<sup>57</sup> Queen's Printer of Ontario, 2021g.

<sup>58</sup> Alliance of BC Students et al, 2021.

**The province should also double its investment in virtual learning infrastructure from \$21.4 million to \$42.8 million to ensure that students across the province, particularly those in rural and northern communities, have access to high quality learning regardless of their proximity to campus<sup>59</sup>. Lastly, the province should also reaffirm its \$90 million investment over three years earmarked for the purchase of modern equipment for postsecondary institutions<sup>60</sup>.**

Going forward, the provincial government needs to do more to ensure that internet services and technology resources become more widely available for Ontario's college students.

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<sup>59</sup> Beaulne-Stuebing, 2021.

<sup>60</sup> Beaulne-Stuebing, 2021.

## HOUSING INSECURITY

**Recommendation 4: The provincial government should provide quality, affordable student housing options; bolster housing information for student tenants, and improve and streamline dispute and resolution pathways.**



Ontario continues to experience exponential growth in college student enrolment, however, despite the increasing number of new students enrolled at colleges across the province, housing infrastructure has not been able to meet this increasing student demand<sup>61 62</sup>. Recent college plans announcing a rapid return to in-person learning have further inflamed a province-wide student housing crisis, as many relocating students are required to find housing quickly.

As a consequence, Ontario's college students continue to face challenges concerning student housing, and are frequently subject to unaffordable options, unsafe locations, poor quality properties, and a lack of adequate housing options<sup>63</sup>. Student housing, particularly near campus, can be overly expensive, in part due to corporate-owned student housing conglomerates and multiple property-owning landlords who exploit their market power to drive up rental prices<sup>64</sup>. Additionally, the provincial government has, in recent years, decreased its funding for postsecondary operating budgets, and consequently many institutions are unable to adequately fund student housing options<sup>65</sup>.

Compounding this issue, students often find it difficult to access the necessary resources regarding their tenant rights and responsibilities<sup>66</sup>. These gaps in knowledge can lead to landlords taking advantage of student renters, particularly international students<sup>67</sup>.

<sup>61</sup> Bell Media, 2021.

<sup>62</sup> University of Toronto, 2021.

<sup>63</sup> Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2020b.

<sup>64</sup> Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2020b.

<sup>65</sup> Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2020b.

<sup>66</sup> Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2020b.

<sup>67</sup> Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2020b.

Furthermore, students report that landlords frequently violate the Residential Tenancies Act (RTA), including actions such as: withholding essential repairs and maintenance, entering a rental unit without adequate prior notice, and requesting confidential details from their tenants<sup>68</sup>. Institutions designed to hold unlawful landlords to account, including the *Landlord Tenant Board (LTB)* or *Rental Housing Enforcement Unit (RHEU)*, are often slow to respond, use complicated processes, and require expensive fees<sup>69</sup>. For students who wish to hold their landlords to account, they are often deterred due to the convoluted, time-consuming, and costly processes required by the LTB and RHEU. Even if a student does manage to secure a favourable decision from the LTB, a landlord may choose to disregard the decision, and the student tenant must seek further enforcement via the courts, which also proves a costly and time-consuming process<sup>70</sup>.

It is necessary that the provincial government address three concerns: ensure quality, affordable student housing across the province, bolster housing information for student tenants, and improve dispute and resolution pathways.

**To ensure quality, affordable housing, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) should first institute a standardized process requiring all potential landlords to register for an annual license on a rental property. The province should then collaborate with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) in order to create an advisory committee on student housing issues, which can be used to identify problems and develop quality, affordable solutions.** This advisory committee can then begin consulting municipalities to authorize residential units for detached, semi-detached, and row houses, and therefore create safe, affordable residential units for students, as proposed in *More Homes, More Choice: Ontario's Housing Supply Action Plan*<sup>71</sup>.

**To bolster housing information for student tenants, the province should develop standardized rental increase communication guidelines which mandate that landlords, for example, deliver adequate notice for rent increases with the original amount, the provincially-approved increase amount, the new rental rate, and the period of time a tenant has for to appeal to the LTB. The province should also collaborate with Legal Aid Ontario (LAO), local municipalities, college administrators, and student associations to identify and fund the dissemination and enforcement of tenant rights and responsibilities, with a clear emphasis on international students.**

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) should mandate municipalities to create tougher rental bylaw processes that focus on high-occupancy tenancies, as well as create a free, province-wide public database of landlords to ensure transparency and quality. In addition, the MMAH should review the RTA, and consult with both tenant and student rights advocacy groups to identify and address gaps, and ensure that landlords abide by the rules.



I moved out of province during the pandemic, found worthwhile employment, increased my savings. All of that will be gone if I need to return to campus for the winter semester.

Now I will need to move back to Toronto, find suitable housing, new employment and a new co-op that is in line with my career goals and financially rewarding.

All in all, the potential to go back to campus for this one semester is going to cost me over \$10,000 outside of tuition.



- Current third year Business student

<sup>68</sup> Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2020b.

<sup>69</sup> Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2020b.

<sup>70</sup> Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2020b.

<sup>71</sup> Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2021c; Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2021d.

Finally, to improve dispute and resolution pathways, the Ministry of the Attorney General (MAG) should first appoint a higher number of adjudicators to ensure claims made to the LTB meet the Landlord & Tenant Board Service Standards. Once the Ontario Ombudsman completes their investigation into delays at the LTB, MMAH should consult campus student housing groups and student associations on how to respond to the findings of the inquiry. The MAG and MMAH should develop a clear, comprehensive plan on how to integrate the LTB and RHEU, and how to establish a central complaints & claims process.

**Finally, the province should amend the Fee Waiver eligibility requirements in order to include OSAP-eligible students and students with financial need.**

Students face unique challenges and barriers to accessing quality, affordable housing, information regarding rental housing and tenant rights, and pathways to addressing rental housing concerns, and it is essential that they are supported provincially.

## INDIGENOUS STUDENT SUPPORT

**Recommendation 5: The provincial government should increase the eligible amounts of OSAP bursaries for Indigenous students, including the Indigenous Student Bursary program, and commit to investing in the maintenance and expansion of Indigenous student services at colleges.**



While COVID-19 has had negative effects on students all across our province, students in Indigenous communities have experienced worsened effects. Indigenous students continue to face added challenges in the post-secondary system, including unmet financial need<sup>72</sup>, remoteness and lack of reliable internet<sup>73</sup>, intergenerational effects of residential schools and colonialism<sup>74</sup>, and underfunded education<sup>75</sup>. However this year, Indigenous communities have seen more negative effects due to COVID-19, in terms of mental health, financial security, and access to services, which has impacted Indigenous students' access to post-secondary education and services at their schools<sup>76 77 78</sup>.

In order for Indigenous students to be successful in their academic careers, they need to have the supports and programs in place within their communities, yet these are often absent or provided inadequately<sup>79</sup>. A recent survey of Indigenous post-secondary students revealed that Indigenous

<sup>72</sup> Indspire, 2018

<sup>73</sup> Sharpe, et al., 2011

<sup>74</sup> Bombay, et al., 2014

<sup>75</sup> Hallmark, et al., 2016

<sup>76</sup> Arriagada, et al., 2020a

<sup>77</sup> Arriagada, et al., 2020b

<sup>78</sup> Greenfield, 2020

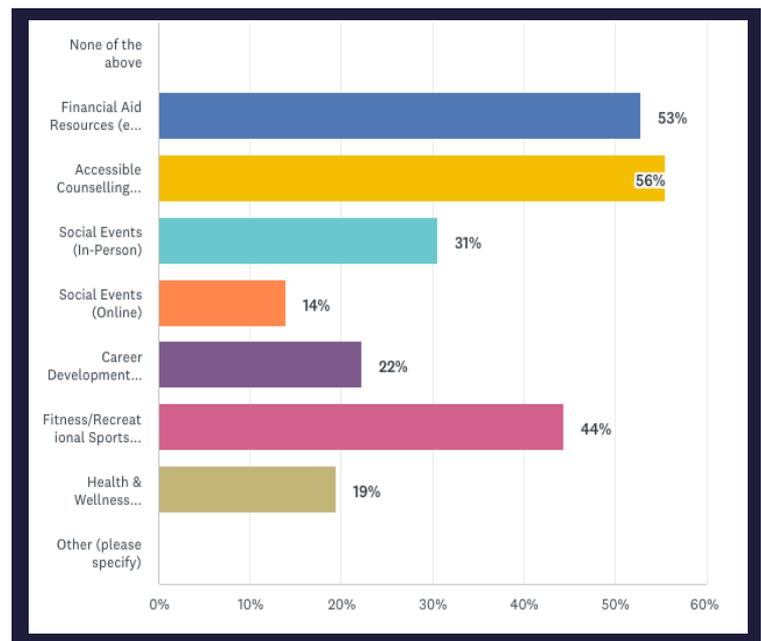
<sup>79</sup> Office of the Auditor General, 2020

student services are significantly underfunded and bursaries for Indigenous students, including OSAP bursaries and the post-secondary student support program, do not meet the financial needs of Indigenous students<sup>80</sup>. Physical distancing measures have further implicated the finances of Indigenous students and the delivery of on-campus Indigenous programs and supports that serve to promote the health and well-being of Indigenous students<sup>81</sup>. In a recent COVID-19 student survey, one challenge identified for Indigenous students was an inability to access cultural events, programming, and elders, which are all integral to the academic life and well-being of Indigenous students<sup>82</sup>. While services have moved into an online capacity where possible, accessing support online can be a challenge without reliable internet for Indigenous students in northern regions or on reserves<sup>83</sup>.

Indigenous students need support now to withstand the pressures of the pandemic and to be successful in their education and future careers. COVID-19 will likely have deeper ramifications for Indigenous students after the pandemic, as Indigenous students often face more challenges after post-secondary within the labour market<sup>84</sup>. Colleges are the major provider of post-secondary education to Indigenous students, so it incumbent on the college institutions to ensure that they have the supports needed to successfully participate in and complete their education<sup>85</sup>.

**The province should increase the eligible amounts of OSAP bursaries for Indigenous students and commit to investing in the maintenance and expansion of Indigenous student services at colleges. To account for the lack of funding available for Indigenous students, the province should increase the funding earmarked for the Indigenous Student Bursary program from \$1.5 million to \$37 million<sup>86</sup>.** As a core element of Ontario's colleges, Indigenous students need immediate provincial action in order to thrive in both their academic studies and careers.

Figure 11 – Desired Support Services for Winter 2022



<sup>80</sup> Indspire, 2018

<sup>81</sup> Greenfield, 2020

<sup>82</sup> CSA, 2021

<sup>83</sup> CRTC, 2019

<sup>84</sup> Bleakney, et al., 2020

<sup>85</sup> Statistics Canada, 2021

<sup>86</sup> Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2021b.

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SUPPORTS

**Recommendation 5: The provincial government should implement a tuition freeze, ensure direct \$1000 tuition relief fund, and increase contributions to college base operating grant fund for Ontario colleges.**



International students represent a significant priority for the Ontario government in its efforts to both diversify and strengthen the economy<sup>87 88 89</sup>, and have been shown to significantly boost Ontario's college sector and economy<sup>90</sup>, including contributing \$10.8 billion in GDP and 118,206 jobs in 2018 alone<sup>91 92</sup>. Efforts to attract international students to Ontario's colleges have been met with profound success<sup>93</sup>; Ontario colleges have experienced an 81 percent increase in enrolment since 2013<sup>94</sup> and continue to grow rapidly.

Yet while international student enrolment has more than tripled since the 2008-09 global financial crisis<sup>95 96</sup>, funding for international student support services has not matched this trend<sup>97</sup>. Over the last decade, Ontario government transfers to colleges have actually declined by 1 percent<sup>98</sup>, and provincial grants and tuition-relief funding are the lowest, proportionally, in Canada<sup>99</sup>.

The absence of reflective funding has led most colleges to rely on tuition, ancillary fees, and other

<sup>87</sup> Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, 2019; Queen's Printer of Ontario, 2021a.

<sup>88</sup> Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2018b.

<sup>89</sup> Choi et al., 2021a.

<sup>90</sup> Global Affairs Canada, 2020.

<sup>91</sup> Global Affairs Canada, 2020.

<sup>92</sup> Government of Canada, 2018.

<sup>93</sup> Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2018a.

<sup>94</sup> Frenette, M., Choi, Y., & Doreleyers, A., 2020.

<sup>95</sup> Usher, A., 2020.

<sup>96</sup> Thevenot, S., 2020.

<sup>97</sup> Usher, A., 2020.

<sup>98</sup> Usher, A., 2020.

<sup>99</sup> Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2012.

funding sources to supplement revenues as provincial government shares decrease<sup>100 101</sup>. For many college institutions, a common strategy for supplementing lost revenue is to increase international student fees<sup>102</sup>. As the Ontario government does not regulate international tuition fees, post-secondary institutions are free to raise fees at their discretion, which has led to fee surges of up to 50 percent in a single year<sup>103</sup>. In the 2019-20 school year, international student tuition averaged \$29,714 per year, up 44 percent from the previous decade<sup>104</sup>.

**\$29,714**

Average international student tuition in 2019-20

Unfortunately, international students are particularly disadvantaged to these increasing financial demands, as they do not have access to valuable methods of government funding, including OSAP, yet have to pay significantly higher tuition fees<sup>105 106</sup>.

To pay for these increasing tuition fees, many international students have turned to on-campus work throughout the school year<sup>107 108</sup>, which is the only mode of work that is exempt from the strict limit of 20 hours per week, as dictated by their study permit<sup>109 110</sup>. However, colleges in Ontario have closed or decreased their operations much of the pandemic, leading to a significant decline in on-campus jobs<sup>111</sup>. For students with on-campus jobs at the start of the pandemic, over half of respondents had either lost their job or been laid off within two months, with nearly half (49 percent) of all respondents

reporting they had lost upcoming job prospects, and only 13 percent reporting they had been able to keep their current employment<sup>112</sup>.

“

I currently work 2 part time jobs (one on campus and the other off campus). I'm concerned that with the shift to more in person classes, I'll have to quit one and that will cause further financial stress as an international student.

”

- Current first year Business student

Without access to on-campus work opportunities, international students are facing increased financial instability and are in immediate need of financial support. In a recent CSA student survey on the impacts of COVID-19, we found that international students are twice as likely as domestic students to not have access to any financial support during the pandemic<sup>113</sup>.

**To address the urgent financial concerns for international students, the province should also implement a tuition freeze for international students, as was done for domestic tuition fees in 2020-21<sup>114</sup>. Additionally, the province should ensure direct tuition relief for international students with demonstrated financial need, which would cost roughly \$33**

<sup>100</sup> Usher, A. 2020.

<sup>101</sup> Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario, 2017.

<sup>102</sup> Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario, 2017.

<sup>103</sup> Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario, 2017.

<sup>104</sup> Usher, 2020.

<sup>105</sup> Usher, 2020.

<sup>106</sup> Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, 2020.

<sup>107</sup> College Federation of Students-Ontario, 2017.

<sup>108</sup> Government of Canada, 2021.

<sup>109</sup> College Federation of Students-Ontario, 2017.

<sup>110</sup> Government of Canada, 2021.

<sup>111</sup> CTV News, 2021.

<sup>112</sup> Statistics Canada, 2020c.

<sup>113</sup> College Student Alliance, 2020.

<sup>114</sup> Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2020.

million if the amount of international students without access to financial support were to receive a \$1000 tuition benefit<sup>115 116</sup>.

**To address long-term challenges, the provincial government must acknowledge that historic underfunding of Ontario's colleges and lack of regulation on tuition fees has accelerated the concerns of international students, and consequently, the province should increase the base operating grant fund for Ontario colleges from \$1.4 billion to \$1.6 billion.** This will help colleges to fund the necessary infrastructure, programming, and supports needed by Ontario's college students, and to ensure that colleges do not offset the burden of lost revenues by increasing international tuition fees<sup>117 118</sup>.

By providing immediate relief through a tuition relief fund and tuition freeze, and increasing the base operating grant fund for Ontario colleges to help ensure financial stability in the college sector, the provincial government can begin to provide the urgent supports needed by Ontario's international students. As international students significantly contribute to Ontario's college sector and economy, it is essential that they have adequate support to succeed in their education.

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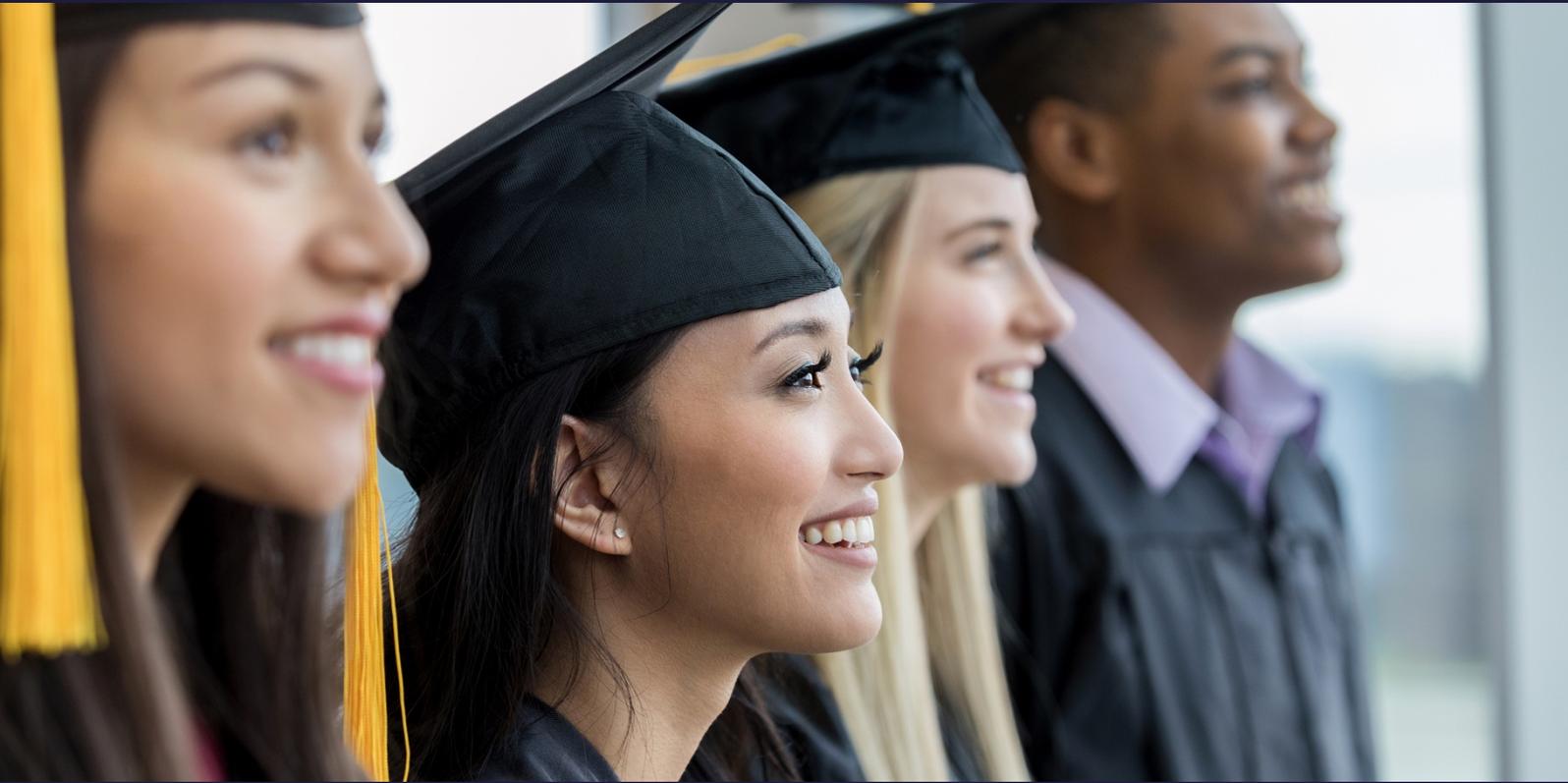
<sup>115</sup> Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2021b.

<sup>116</sup> McMackon, 2021.

<sup>117</sup> The Varsity, 2021.

<sup>118</sup> Beaulne-Stuebing, 2021.

## CONCLUSION



College students are an innovative and adaptive driving force of Ontario's economy that are heading into one of the most complex and demanding labour markets in recent memory. While the college student experience has become increasingly complex in recent years, the pandemic has exacerbated the concerns of students while adding new obstacles into their paths.

College students are a growingly diverse and highly-skilled population that can persevere and overcome the financial, mental health, academic, and labour market obstacles presented by the pandemic, if they have the adequate resources and services to support them along the way. A skilled student population with the required support to successfully graduate and enter the workforce is essential in the recovery and rebuilding of our province.

If enacted, CSA's recommendations will help to ensure that college students are adequately supported to successfully complete their programs and contribute to a brighter future for Ontario.

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