



2024 BC Budget Consultation Submission

Contents:

Student Financial Aid

Sexualized Violence Prevention

Food Security



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The AMS of UBC (Vancouver)

The Alma Mater Society (AMS) of the University of British Columbia Vancouver stands as a united voice for **over 60,000 undergraduate and graduate students**^[1] and is incorporated under B.C.'s Societies Act. As influential advocates, we tirelessly strive to enhance the quality of students' educational, social, and personal lives. The AMS of UBC aims to champion affordable, accessible, and equitable post-secondary education throughout British Columbia. This submission highlights key areas where the province can make significant improvements to meet the collective needs of students.

The AMS calls upon the provincial government to act by implementing crucial steps to pave the way for a brighter future. By embracing our recommendations, we can create an educational landscape that empowers students and unlocks their full potential.

Together, let us forge a path toward a better tomorrow where every student has an equal opportunity to thrive and succeed. The provincial government can take several immediate steps to achieve those goals, and the **AMS is recommending the following:**

Student Financial Aid

1. Invest in the B.C. Access Grant by increasing the maximum amount given out per student and the grant cut-off threshold to improve accessibility to higher education for financially disadvantaged students.

Sexualized Violence Prevention

2. Provide support against sexualized violence: commit annual funding to establish and maintain sexualized violence prevention offices at post-secondary institutions across the province.

Food Security

3. Establish a new needs-based grant aimed at mitigating food insecurity amongst students from low and middle-income backgrounds.

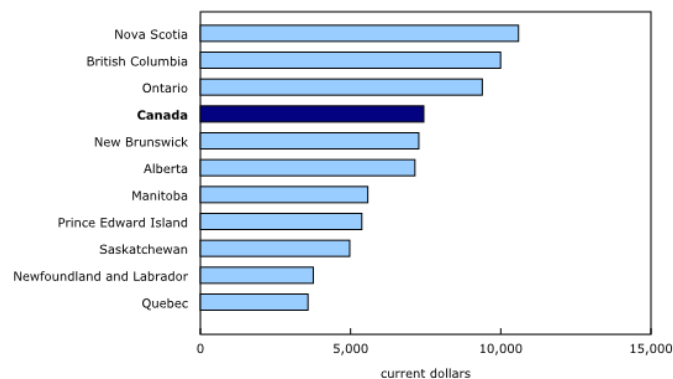
Student Financial Aid

Recommendation 1: Invest in the B.C. Access Grant by increasing the maximum amount given out per student and the grant cut-off threshold to improve accessibility to higher education for financially disadvantaged students.

“Access to finances shouldn’t be a barrier to preparing for an in-demand career in B.C. This is an immediate-term action to make education more accessible as we continue the work on our medium-term plans to review the post-secondary funding model and expand the B.C. Access Grant,” said Selina Robinson, Minister of Post-secondary Education and Future Skills. “Making education more accessible and affordable is a major focus for our government and an important part of our Future Ready plan.” The BC Access Grant has been instrumental in supporting low- and middle-income students in pursuing post-secondary education. However, many students face financial hardships, particularly housing, tuition, and other educational expenses. Student loan debt in B.C. is nearly \$4.5 billion, and the average student loan debt after a four-year degree is over \$30,000^[iii] and important steps are needed to address these challenges and ensure equitable access to education. It is recommended to increase the maximum payout of the B.C. Access Grant. This policy recommendation aims to alleviate the financial burden on students and promote their academic success and well-being.

The B.C. Access Grant, implemented in 2020, has successfully enabled over 40,000 students to pursue higher education and training. By facilitating access for students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, this grant has not only empowered individuals to fulfill their academic aspirations but has also contributed to the overall growth and development of our province’s workforce. “It’s part of our government’s work to build a strong economy for everyone, where people can get good, well-paying jobs that support them and their families, and businesses can access more skilled workers,” said Premier John Horgan.

Students who receive higher education and training tend to possess the expertise required for industries with higher skill demands, leading to increased productivity and economic growth. In 2011, Statistics Canada undertook a household survey of the top 1 percent of earners; it found that over 87 percent of top earners had post-secondary qualifications.^[iii] Other grants, such as the Stronger BC Future Skills grant, also seek to help alleviate pressures on students in trades; however, while short-term skill training is important to the health of our province’s workforce, we must not forget about students pursuing other options. The impact of the pandemic on the economy has been significant, causing prices to rise and inflation to take its toll on people with fixed incomes. Students, already burdened by the rising education and living expenses, have been particularly affected.^[iv] In 2022/23, graduate students in British Columbia will pay \$9994, representing 34.4% more than the Canadian average.^[v]



Average Graduate Tuition Fees for Full-Time Students

It is crucial to acknowledge that the financial strain students face not only hampers their ability to succeed academically but also undermines the progress made through initiatives like the B.C. Access Grant. In 2016, the Conference Board of Canada reported that B.C.’s relative lack of educated workers costs our economy almost \$8 billion in lost GDP and nearly \$2 billion in revenue to the government.^[vi]

ADDRESSING HOUSING-RELATED FINANCIAL HARDSHIPS

Research indicates that 57% of UBC students have experienced financial hardship due to the high cost of housing, a 17% increase from 2021 (40%).^[vii] The affordability crisis in the housing market has made it increasingly difficult for students across the province to find affordable accommodations near their educational institutions. Among graduate respondents, 31% reported that they think they might not “be able to come back to UBC at some point in the future due to financial reasons, an increase from 2021 (18%).^[viii] In Vancouver, residents are spending about 40% of their income on rent^[ix], and by increasing the maximum payout of the B.C. Access Grant students will have greater financial support to secure safe and affordable housing, allowing them to focus on their studies without the added stress of housing-related expenses.

ALLEVIATING TUITION AND OTHER EXPENSES

The rising education costs, including textbooks and course materials, create significant financial barriers for students. Textbook costs have reportedly soared, jumping from an average amount spent on them from \$893 in 2021 to \$1,253 in 2022 for undergraduate students. For Graduate students, the average amount increased from \$613.90 to \$921.60.^[x] A notable 26% of UBC students experience financial hardship related to textbooks and course materials. Approximately 29% of UBC students have had to go without a textbook or other course resources due to cost.^[xi]

Limited access to essential educational resources hinders learning outcomes and negatively impacts academic performance. The high cost of these resources often forces students to go without them, impacting their learning experience and academic performance. By increasing the maximum payout of the B.C. Access Grant, students will have greater financial resources to cover these expenses, ensuring their educational journey is not hindered by financial constraints. This increase in the grant will reduce the need for students to work long

hours outside of their studies, enable them to fully engage in their academic pursuits, and create a more inclusive learning environment for all students.

MITIGATING THE RISK OF DROPOUT

Financial constraints can lead to significant challenges for students, with 31% of graduate students thinking that they might not be able to come back to UBC at some point in the future due to financial reasons, an increase from 2021 (18%) and at the same time 20% of undergraduate students reported thinking the same, which is an increase from 2021 (15%).^[xii] The fear of not being able to afford tuition fees or other expenses may result in a higher risk of student dropout by increasing the maximum payout of the B.C. Access Grant, students will feel more supported financially, reducing the likelihood of dropping out and ensuring their continued enrollment and academic success.

Investing in students’ financial well-being is an investment in the future of British Columbia, ensuring that all individuals have equal opportunities to thrive academically and contribute to the prosperity of our province. To address the financial hardships students face, increasing the maximum payout of the B.C. Access Grant is crucial. By providing students with additional financial support for housing, tuition, course materials, and other expenses, we can alleviate their financial burdens and promote equitable access to education. This policy recommendation aims to foster student success, reduce dropout rates, and create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment.

Sexualized Violence Prevention

Recommendation 2: Provide support against sexualized violence by committing annual funding to maintain and establish Sexualised Violence Prevention Offices at Post-secondary institutions across the province.

“I know how important it is for students to participate in school and campus life without worrying about their safety, whether in class, working or studying, or at a social gathering,” said Anne Kang, Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training. “We’re continuing to work with students, faculty, staff and the many student associations and groups, to fund and support a range of initiatives to raise awareness, prevent and respond to sexualized violence.”^[xiii]

Increasing support for sexualized violence prevention on post-secondary campuses is essential for ensuring the safety and well-being of the students, who will constitute almost 80% of the labor market upon graduation.^[xiv] While Bill 23, introduced in 2016, mandated post-secondary institutions to implement sexual misconduct policy, recent statistics highlight the need to expand support.

The statistics speak for themselves. Out of every 100 incidents of sexual assault, only six are reported to the police,^[xv] indicating a significant underreporting problem. Additionally, one in every three Canadian women experiences sexual assaults in their lifetime, emphasizing the widespread nature of this important issue.^[xvi] Disturbingly, while victimization rates from 2004 to 2014 declined for all crimes, sexual assault rates have increased.^[xvii] These figures signify the urgent need for targeted efforts to address and prevent sexual violence.

It is important to acknowledge that the risk of experiencing sexual violence on post-secondary campuses is even higher for women who face numerous forms of identity-based marginalization.^[xviii] The marginalized groups, including aboriginal women, women with disabilities, and transgender women, make it crucial to tailor prevention

initiatives to their needs.

To effectively address sexualized violence prevention at post-secondary institutions across the province, it is crucial to commit annual funding to support the successful running of dedicated prevention offices. This funding should consider the population size of each institution and evaluate the existing programs in place. This funding would be in addition to the \$500,000 federal government funding to expand the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response training series to address gaps in terms of the safety of students and sexualized violence through digital communication channels that are expected to be in effect from Summer 2024.^[xix]

ALLOCATE MORE FUNDING FOR SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION RESOURCES

Increasing the overall funding dedicated to sexual violence prevention initiatives in post-secondary institutions would ensure that these offices have adequate resources to implement effective prevention programs, provide support services, and conduct outreach activities. As per the 2022 AMS Academic Experience Survey Report, 52% of undergraduate students and 28% of graduates are concerned about the prevalence of sexual assault at UBC.^[xx] Additionally, 1 out of 5 UBC students personally experience sexual assault or misconduct, of which 72% identified as females and 13% as males.^[xxi]

In 2019, the Ministry of Advanced Education invested \$760,000 to support prevention initiatives on campuses. However, this funding has not been renewed, despite the concerning rise in sexual offenses in British Columbia by 14.1% compared to 2020.^[xxii] Moreover, a survey conducted at the University of British Columbia revealed that 1 out of 5 UBC students personally experience sexual assault or misconduct, of which 72% identified as females and 13% as males.^[xxiii] An increase in funding would help sustain and expand prevention resources, tools, and programs, responding to the long-standing demands of the students for greater action.

ROBUST DATA COLLECTION AND COMMITTING ANNUAL FUNDING TO AID SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE PREVENTION OFFICES

Establish province-wide surveys to understand better the prevalence and nature of sexual violence and harassment in post-secondary institutions. This data would provide a comprehensive framework for addressing the issue and setting specific objectives for prevention efforts in consideration with the existing programs and resources in place at each institution and providing additional funding accordingly. If UBC students personally experienced sexual assaults or misconduct, students would be most comfortable accessing support from SASC (UBC Sexual Assault Support Centre) (60%) and SVPRO (Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office) (56%).^[xxiv] As evident, this approach would help address specific needs and challenges faced by individual institutions while ensuring equitable distribution of resources across the province.

To effectively address sexualized violence prevention in post-secondary institutions across the province, it is crucial to commit annual funding to support the successful running of sexualized violence prevention offices. This funding should consider the population size of each institution and the existing programs in place. By providing consistent financial support, the government can ensure the availability of necessary resources and services, which will contribute to creating safer campus environments.

Statistics reveal the pressing need for increased funding for sexualized violence prevention. Nearly two-thirds of on-campus assaults occur during the first eight weeks of school.^[xxv] Additionally, in 2020, one in four women and one in six men reported experiencing inappropriate sexualized behaviors in the workplace.^[xxvi] Furthermore, 2SLGBTQ+ students experience physical assault, unwanted sexual touching, attempted sexual assault, and sexual assault at significantly higher rates than cisgender heterosexual students.^[xxvii]

Insufficient funding for sexual violence prevention resources leads to a lack of accessible support systems, exacerbating the issue. Insufficient resources negatively impact survivors' mental health and well-being and hinder their ability to report incidents and seek assistance.^[xxviii]

By committing annual funding, the government can allocate resources to vital initiatives such as training programs, counseling services, and awareness campaigns, ultimately contributing to a safer environment for all students.

To support this recommendation, a province-wide survey should be conducted to understand better the prevalence and nature of sexual violence and harassment in post-secondary institutions. By collecting accurate and comprehensive data, the government can gain insights into different institutions' specific needs and challenges and develop targeted strategies to address them.

While supporting sexualized violence prevention offices should be a minimum standard, it is essential to advocate for reviewing policies across all post-secondary institutions. In conclusion, by committing annual funding and providing consistent financial support, and collecting comprehensive data, the government can facilitate the implementation of effective prevention programs and enhance the well-being and safety of students. Prioritizing sexual violence prevention contributes to social well-being, reduces negative impacts on mental health, and ensures a productive and inclusive academic environment. By committing resources and involving students, we can work together on a safer post-secondary environment that prioritizes the prevention of sexualized violence and supports the well-being of students.

Food Security

Recommendation 3: Establishing a Non-Repayable Food Security Grant Program for Post-Secondary Students from low and middle-income backgrounds.

“Food security in British Columbia requires an available, affordable, and uninterrupted supply of nutritious food,” said Premier David Eby. “At the same time, we need targeted, effective programs that support the people and communities most impacted by rising inflation, climate events, and supply-chain shocks.”^[xxxix]

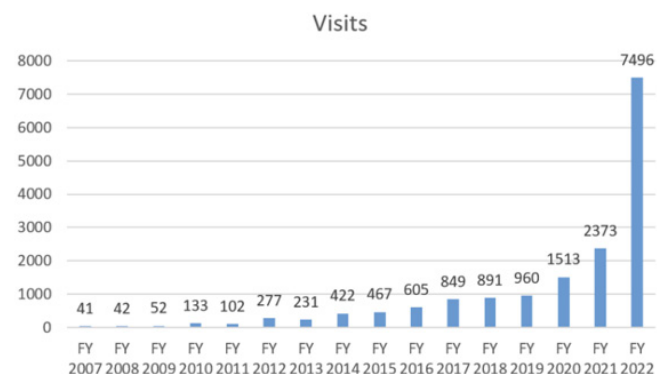
Given the rising grocery prices and increased expenses, many students are burdened with the difficult choice between paying tuition fees or buying nutritious food. With the alarming rise in grocery prices and the increasing financial burden students face, immediate action must be taken to address this pressing matter. The Non-Repayable Food Security Grant initiative addresses food insecurity among low- and middle-income post-secondary students. This program will financially support students struggling to afford adequate accomplishments while pursuing their education.

Food insecurity among post-secondary students requires urgent attention from the government. With grocery prices rising by a significant 11.4% in 2022,^[xxx] students are burdened with increased expenses. In 2023, a family of four is projected to face an annual food expenditure of up to \$16,288.41, representing a \$1065.60 increase^[xxxi] from the previous year. Additionally, purchasing staple grocery items for the AMS Food Bank for the 2022/23 year is projected to cost \$225,110.06. In 2023/24, that cost is expected to grow to \$449,000 to account for increased food inflationary costs of 7% and a scheduled user demand growth of 100% (but ending support for UBC staff). These figures highlight the dire circumstances faced by our students struggling to make ends meet.

As per the 2022 AMS Academic Experiences Survey report, 2 out of 5 undergraduate participants reported that they were worried that

they might run out of food in the past 12 months. These numbers were even a larger concern amongst graduate students, as 50% of the students believed so. On matters of food insecurity, 3 out of 5 undergraduate respondents pointed to high housing cause as the main reason they are facing food insecurity.^[xxxii]

The demand for food banks on campuses has surged dramatically. Students have been deeply impacted, as evident by the staggering 315% surge in need at the AMS Food Bank as of October 2022. Students have been particularly affected, and food insecurity has become a pressing issue across many University campuses in the province, with the University of British Columbia (UBC) being just one example.



AMS Food Bank Visits per Fiscal Year (May-April)

The situation has become so dire that even UBC staff members have been excluded from accessing the AMS food bank since April 2023 due to insufficient funding.^[xxxiii] This exclusion further exacerbates the issue, leaving staff members without a reliable food source, who may also face financial hardships. However, it is important to recognize that this issue extends beyond UBC and is prevalent across universities in the province. The high demand at the AMS Food Bank is just one indicator of a larger problem that requires attention at a systemic level. To address this issue of food insecurity effectively, the province must prioritize and ensure that universities create a culture of food security for their communities. By acknowledging

and addressing the issue of food insecurity, the province can take significant steps toward ensuring that people, students, and staff have access to nutritious and affordable meals.

Moreover, creating a culture of food security goes beyond providing immediate relief. It involves fostering an environment where individuals are empowered to overcome food insecurity through educational initiatives, advocacy, and long-term solutions.

While campus food banks have played a crucial role, a dedicated grant program would further enhance student well-being by providing direct financial assistance, as the benefits would directly go into students' pockets. Therefore, to ensure the effectiveness and fair distribution of the proposed food security grant, it is recommended to align its eligibility criteria with the existing B.C. Access Grant program, which targets students from low and middle-income families. By doing so, the program can reach those most in need and ensure that the support is adequately distributed.

Investing in Grants specifically designed for post-secondary students will enhance food distribution and accessibility. Considering the success of the UBC Meal Share program, which provides non-repayable funds to students facing financial barriers^[xxxiv] by adding value to their university cards or providing grocery gift cards, we strongly urge the provincial government to invest in a similar grant program for all post-secondary students in British Columbia. While campus food banks have played a crucial role, additional support directly allocated to students is essential for their overall well-being. No student should have to choose between tuition fees and adequate nourishment.

Prioritizing student welfare is vital because adults struggling with food insecurity face a higher risk of physical and mental health issues,^[xxxv] negatively impacting the future labor market. To ensure effectiveness & fair distribution, we recommend aligning the eligibility criteria of the proposed grant with the B.C. Access Grant. By directly providing assistance to students, this solution will significantly contribute to alleviating the food insecurity crisis.

It will build upon the government's previous investments of over \$200 million^[xxxvi] in food security and strengthen efforts to improve access to affordable food.

By directly providing non-repayable grants to students, this program will specifically contribute to alleviating the food insecurity crisis and create a more supportive environment for their education. Overall, establishing a Non-Repayable Food Security Grant Program by the government can provide essential financial support to post-secondary students, ensuring their well-being and contributing to a healthier and more productive future workforce. By proactively addressing this issue, the province can play a vital role in ensuring that no one within its university communities goes hungry, thus creating a more equitable and inclusive educational experience for all. With this grant, we can make a profound difference in the lives of countless students who are currently grappling with food insecurity.

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