



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 (UBC) Vancouver represents over 60,000 undergraduate and graduate students and is incorporated under BC's Societies Act. We strive to improve the quality of students' educational, social, and personal lives by advocating for affordable and accessible post-secondary education in BC. The province can take several immediate steps to achieve those goals, and the AMS is recommending the following:

Student Financial Aid

1. Invest in the BC 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 postsecondary institutions across the province.

Food Security

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

Student Financial Aid

Recommendation 1: Invest in the BC 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.

The B.C. Access Grant, implemented in 2020, has successfully enabled over 40,000 students to pursue higher education and training. This grant facilitates access for students from low- and middle-income backgrounds, contributing to the growth and development of BC's workforce.

Since 2020, the impact of the COVID-19 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 costs of education and living expenses, have been particularly affected. The financial strain on students not only hampers their ability to succeed academically but also undermines the progress made through initiatives like the B.C. Access Grant.

The province's investment of the \$480-million action plan provides a future skills grant that removes barriers for people accessing more than 400 training opportunities. We believe an investment in students in higher education also has far-reaching benefits. It not only promotes equal opportunities but strengthens our province's workforce and economy. By empowering students to pursue higher education and training without undue financial strain, we are cultivating a highly skilled and diverse workforce that will contribute to innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable economic growth.

We recommend expanding the BC Access Grant by increasing the maximum grant amount given out per year and the grant cut-off threshold in order to combat increased cost of living. As of 2023, the average cost of postsecondary education is topping \$80,000, the average student loan in Canada grew by 3.5% from 2019, with the average

debtor owing \$26,075. It is evident that students are falling to the effects of inflation, but the government can help by expanding the maximum grant amount, allowing all qualified candidates to receive more aid.

Sexualized Violence Prevention

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

Increasing support towards sexualized violence prevention across post-secondary campuses is crucial to the safety and well-being of students, who will make up almost 80% of the labor market upon graduation. While Bill 23, introduced in 2016, mandated public post-secondary institutions to implement a sexual misconduct policy, recent alarming statistics highlight the need for expanding this support.

- Of every 100 incidents of sexual assault, only six are reported to the police.
- 1 in 3 Canadian women will experience sexual assault in their life.
- Sexual assault is not decreasing. Victimization rates from 2004 to 2014 declined for all crimes except sexual assault.

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. The marginalized groups, including aboriginal women, women with disabilities, and transgender women, makes it crucial to tailor prevention initiatives to their specific needs.

To address these challenges, annual funding should be committed directly to sexualized violence prevention offices at post-secondary institutions across the province. This will enable the expansion of prevention programs to address sexualized violence in a trauma-informed manner. Notably, a staggering 71% of students who witnessed or experienced unwanted sexualized behaviors - either on or off campus, involved students or other people associated with the institution. In 2019, an investment of \$760,000 from the Ministry of Advanced Education to

support prevention initiatives on campuses was implemented. However, this funding has not been renewed despite the concerning rise in sexual offenses in British Columbia by 14.1% compared to 2020. As of 2022, 1 out of 5 UBC students responded they personally experienced sexual assault or other sexual misconduct. An increase in funding will maintain and grow prevention resources, tools, and programs to address the ongoing call for increased action from students for decades.

Food Security

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

Food insecurity among post-secondary students demands urgent attention from the government. With grocery prices rising by a significant 11.4% in 2022, 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 from the previous year.

Students are particularly impacted, with a staggering 315% surge in demand at the AMS Food Bank at the University of British Columbia (UBC) as of October 2022. Insufficient funding has led to the exclusion of UBC staff from accessing the AMS Food Bank since April 2023, and the province must prioritize and ensure that universities create a culture of food security for their communities.

Considering the success of the UBC Meal Share program, which provides non-repayable funds to students facing financial barriers, we strongly urge the provincial government to invest in a similar grant program for all post-secondary students in British Columbia. No student should have to choose between tuition fees and adequate nourishment. While campus food banks have played a crucial role, additional support directly allocated to students is essential for their overall well-being.

Prioritizing student welfare is vital because adults struggling with food insecurity face a higher risk of physical and mental health issues, negatively impacting the future labour market. To ensure effectiveness & fair distribution, we recommend aligning the eligibility criteria of the proposed grant with the BC Access Grant. By directly providing grants to students, this solution will build upon the government's previous investments of over \$200

million in food security and strengthen efforts to improve access to affordable food.

The establishment of 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 the alleviation of the food insecurity crisis.