

ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES: SOLUTIONS TO ONTARIO'S CHALLENGES



The Issue: The COVID-19 pandemic has touched every industry and sector that enable Ontario's diverse regions to thrive, and the university sector is no exception. As Ontario focuses on restoring its competitive economy, increasing investments in a high-quality university sector over the long-term will ensure Ontario's universities can continue to make their fullest contributions during recovery and beyond.

Background

- Ontario's universities remain committed to supporting students, their communities and the province through the pandemic and beyond as together we face the challenges of a rapidly changing society head-on and work to find solutions.
- Today's students – the province's future makers – are entering an ever-evolving economic, technological and social landscape.
- To help them navigate these changes, Ontario's universities are adapting programming in areas, such as work-integrated learning, and providing additional resources and support systems for student mental health and well-being that will help students prepare for today and tomorrow.
- Universities remain committed to supporting these students, their communities and the province through the waves of the pandemic and beyond as together we face the challenges of a rapidly changing society head-on and work to find solutions.
- Increasing investments in the sector is critical to ensuring universities remain able to support the fight against COVID-19; provide essential online and mental health services to students; develop a highly skilled and adaptable workforce; strengthen industries, businesses and communities; drive ground-breaking innovation and help restore Ontario's competitive economy.

Ontario's universities are working to ensure students graduate job ready by developing micro-internships, work placements, co-op programs and other work-integrated learning (WIL) programs at an unprecedented scale – the types of experiences that both students and employers value. These approaches allow higher education to be more responsive to the diverse needs of students graduating into an increasingly complex labour market.



84%

Percentage of students reporting that the pandemic has added new or exacerbated existing mental health challenges, according to a Canadian Alliance of Student Associations survey.

How Universities Can Continue to Support Ontario

- Ontario's university sector has incurred many costs due COVID-19 that include developing alternative modes of course and exam delivery, as well as mental health and wellness services; reconfiguring classrooms and residences to accommodate distancing protocols, creating quarantine spaces and ensuring access to appropriate personal protective equipment; and providing emergency relief funds for students.
- These financial challenges have been further compounded by reduced revenue to the sector with universities seeing a decline in inflation-adjusted operating grants per student by 21% since 2006-07.
- An ongoing tuition freeze and a 10-per-cent cut to domestic tuition has cost the sector **\$1.2 billion** since 2019. Each additional year of a tuition freeze means universities will lose **\$740 million** in foregone revenue.
- This pattern of reduced investment by government threatens universities' ability to address growing needs for modernized programs and learning environments; increased campus services in areas such as student mental health; and more cost-intensive resources to foster a culture of innovation.
- In order to ensure Ontario successfully recovers from the pandemic and meet the needs of a growing economy, government and universities need to work together to expand university education in Ontario.

Partnering to Rebuild Ontario

Vibrant universities will continue to develop adaptable talent, help rebuild our health-care system, as well as drive innovation and regional economic development.

It is why in order to fully unleash this potential, Ontario's universities are asking that the government – through increases to university revenue sources, such as expanding spaces in high-demand programs – make critical investments in the sector today to rebuild a better Ontario for tomorrow.

By working together, we can navigate through this pandemic, safeguard Ontario's health and economy and build a brighter future – not just for the students we teach and the communities we serve, but for Ontario's future and all who live here.