ONTARIO'S UNIVERSITIES:
PARTNERING TO DRIVE JOBS AND GROWTH

2023 Pre-Budget Submission to the Ontario Government
CONTENTS

3 Introduction

4 Supporting Student Success
   Graduating Job-Ready Students
   Helping Build Resiliency through Student Supports

8 Driving a Competitive Economy
   Developing Highly Skilled Talent for In-Demand Jobs
   Creating a Competitive Advantage through Research and Commercialization

12 Fueling Regional Economic Development
   Driving Economic Growth in Local Communities
   Building the Infrastructure that Supports Students and Communities

14 Rebuilding Ontario’s Health-Care System
   Supplying A Highly Skilled Health Workforce
   Ontario-Made Innovations in Health Care and Biomedical Technology

16 Strengthening a University Sector in Transformation

18 Further Reading
INTRODUCTION

Ontario’s success is founded on the capacity of its people to innovate, create jobs and bolster economic growth.

Now, more than ever, Ontarians must work together to address some of the biggest challenges facing our province, such as how to meet critical labour force needs, rebuild a strained health-care system and foster innovation and economic growth.

Working with government, business and other community partners, Ontario’s universities can and will help by:

1. **Supporting Student Success**
2. **Driving a Competitive Economy**
3. **Fueling Regional Economic Development**
4. **Rebuilding Ontario’s Health-Care System**
5. **Strengthening a University Sector in Transformation**

A vibrant and healthy university sector is critical to meeting the needs of students, fostering community economic growth, driving research and innovation and developing the highly skilled talent critical to Ontario’s economy.

It is why, in order to fully unleash their potential, Ontario’s universities are asking for support – to allow greater flexibility to increase their revenue sources.

Ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of Ontario’s universities means universities can continue to support students, deliver high-demand programs, foster research and innovation and drive economic growth in communities throughout Ontario.
SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS

Today’s students — Ontario’s future makers — are entering a rapidly changing economic, technological and social landscape.

Both at home and across the globe, social change continues to propel our society forward, while jobs and labour markets are being transformed at a rapid pace. In fact, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recently stated that more than one billion jobs – one third of all global jobs – will be transformed by technology over the next 10 years.

At the same time, Ontario’s universities continue to see growing needs for modernized programs and learning environments; increased campus services in areas such as student mental health; and more resources to foster a culture of innovation.

Universities continue to transform their programming to provide students with job-ready skills, work-integrated learning and entrepreneurship opportunities across disciplines, including STEM, humanities and the social sciences.

In addition, universities are working to ensure students are part of a strong network of career and mental health supports, as the way we live, work and learn continues to change.

Graduating Job-Ready Students

With a high demand for transferrable skills from the province’s employers, Ontario’s universities are equipping students with the type of skills needed to navigate the changing workforce, seize new economic opportunities and weather economic downturns.

Ontario university students are graduating job-ready and resilient. In the latest Ministry of Colleges and Universities’ 2020 Graduate Survey of 2018 graduates, university graduates had an employment rate of nearly 93 per cent two years after graduation. More than 90 per cent of those with full-time employment worked in jobs that were either closely or somewhat related to the skills they developed at university.

During the last four economic recessions, Canadians with a Bachelor’s degree or higher were less than half as likely to experience job loss, according to Statistics Canada. Additionally, Statistics Canada found that university graduates were less likely than the general working population to draw on the federal Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) during the pandemic.

The success of university graduates demonstrates that graduates continue to possess the skills employers are looking for, as they find meaningful and well-paying jobs.
In particular, interpersonal and communication skills were recently listed as the most sought-after skills in prospective entry-level and mid-career employees, according to a recent report by the Business + Higher Education Roundtable (BHER). Empowering People for Recovery and Growth: 2022 Skills Survey Report: “The value employers place on these and other human skills aligns with recent research showing that the most in demand skills for today and tomorrow’s labour market are ‘social and emotional.’”

In addition, RBC’s Bridging the Gap: What Canadians Told Us About the Skills Revolution found that 92 per cent of recruiters say soft skills, such as creativity, persuasion, collaboration, adaptability and time management, matter as much or more than hard skills.

Each and every Ontario university offers programming that fosters the development of an adaptable skillset, as well as invaluable work-integrated learning opportunities that are critical for preparing students for the workforce and helping employers strengthen their talent pipelines.

Arts and humanities graduates gain vital skills in critical thinking, creativity, communications and research. To help support the needs of local employers, the Humanities Career Apprenticeship Program at one Ontario university is connecting recent arts and humanities graduates with full-time, paid employment opportunities in the local community. The one-year program provides students with access to networking and mentorship opportunities, helping define their career path, while retaining top talent in the region.

At one Ontario university, students are getting the clinical training they need with innovative software that uses patient Avatars – each with its own name, age, illness and personality. Students log into the program and, with the click of a button, can virtually wash their hands and provide patient privacy by pulling back the hospital curtain. They then treat Avatars as real patients by introducing themselves, taking medical histories, assessing psychomotor skills, administering medications and resolving any conflicts and ethical issues.

Through these types of opportunities, universities will continue to ensure students are well-equipped with transferrable skills and hands-on experiences to help them adapt, as the world of work continues to change.

Helping Build Resiliency through Student Supports

Students arrive on university campuses with varying life experiences, which both adds to the rich diversity of our campus communities and also creates highly unique and individualized experiences.

Tools that foster resiliency are invaluable in helping ensure student success throughout university and beyond. That’s why universities are working to build on – and expand – critically important student support and academic success programs, while better connecting students with the resources they need.

In 2021-22, Ontario’s universities spent more than $1.4 billion on student services, according to the Council of Ontario Finance Officers (COFO), which includes counselling, career guidance and placement, student health, athletics and more. Overall, spending on student services has increased by nearly 22% over the past five years with universities spending an average of 13% of their operating fund on student services.

For example, recognizing the growing need for student mental health supports, universities across the province continue to partner with colleges and student groups to highlight the importance of a whole-of-community approach to student mental health – working to ensure
students are supported from K-12 to postsecondary and into adulthood.

With 75 per cent of mental health issues beginning before the age of 25, postsecondary students are particularly vulnerable to these experiences.

Since the pandemic, a Canadian Alliance of Student Associations report, The New Abnormal: Student Mental Health Two Years Into COVID-19, found that 3 out of 4 students reported their mental health has been negatively impacted by COVID-19. The majority of respondents reported the pandemic has either worsened their pre-existing mental health challenges (74 per cent) or created new mental health struggles (61 per cent).

In fact, prior to the pandemic, the total number of students registering a mental health disability as their primary disability had increased by 151 per cent in seven years, according to data collected by the Council of Ontario Universities (COU).

Through initiatives, such as In It Together, the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (CICMH) and Good2Talk, universities will continue to partner and work to support student mental health for the well-being of our students and communities. But more can be done through increased supports for student mental health that will positively impact the trajectory of students’ lives.

University student supports span beyond mental health and wellness needs as well; they are wide-ranging, complex and ever-evolving, and include:

• Addressing disproportionately inequitable outcomes for groups that have been typically underrepresented

• Helping ensure every willing and qualified student can access a university education by providing more than $1.2 billion annually in scholarships, bursaries and grants (Council of Ontario Finance Officers data) to those facing the greatest financial need

• Implementing inter-cultural training, mentorship programs and gender-based campus safety initiatives

Through strategic planning, universities have worked with students, faculty and staff, as well as external community partners to gain insights that will help ensure meaningful action towards fully inclusive communities.

Universities will continue to engage with campus and local communities to develop action plans aimed at redressing the inequities that exist within the sector today and responding to the need for more initiatives that reach all students, helping foster student success throughout a student’s postsecondary studies and beyond.

Supporting Ontario’s International Students

International students at Ontario’s universities continue to play a vital role within the social and cultural fabric of Ontario. Their unique perspectives and insights from around the world help strengthen Ontario’s diversity and help enrich campuses and our local communities.

More than 38% of all international students in Canada are studying in Ontario, according to Statistics Canada.

101,165 international students enrolled at Ontario’s universities during the 2021-22 academic year, according to the Ministry of Colleges and Universities.
Universities across the province offer a wide-range of key services and wraparound supports tailored to international students, such as:

- Supporting the transition to studying and living in Ontario through orientation, peer support and access to student life, as well as mental health and wellness resources
- Providing access to financial supports through scholarships and awards
- Aiding students with maintaining Canadian government immigration documents (Study Permit, Temporary Residence Visa)
- Offering information on applying to work in Canada, including co-op work permits, social insurance numbers and income tax, and helping students explore post-graduation opportunities
- Organizing cultural and social programming that provides meaningful opportunities for connection with other students and the surrounding community

In addition, Ontario’s universities play a vital role in providing both domestic and international students with access to housing.

They are partnering with the province, municipalities and community partners to identify opportunities and develop purpose-built student housing.

In a 2022 survey of 16 Ontario universities conducted by COU, universities have added more than 6,400 new residence spaces over the past five years. There are currently more than 59,600 total residence spaces, and it is projected that more than 9,000 new spaces will be added over the next five years, with several universities developing plans for expansion beyond 2028.

Streamlining approval processes and reducing regulatory barriers hindering the construction of new university housing will help ensure students can live close to where they work and study, resulting in a range of social and economic benefits as these students patronize local businesses and engage with their communities.

Ontario’s universities remain committed to ensuring all domestic and international students have access to the resources and supports they need to be successful throughout their studies and after they graduate.
2

DRIVING A COMPETITIVE ECONOMY

The combination of highly skilled university talent and the ground-breaking innovations they spark, is critical to helping Ontario respond to the needs of the job market, drive solutions that fuel economic growth and compete with the best that Europe, India, China or the U.S. has to offer.

Ontario’s tech sector, for example, is an important driver of the province’s economy and one that brings together highly skilled talent and innovation. Cities such as Toronto, Ottawa and Waterloo, have become high-tech ecosystems, attracting companies like Amazon, Meta, General Electric and Umicore – all of which are looking to invest in Ontario talent.

In addition, universities continue to work with local entrepreneurs and community partners to help ensure more of the economic benefits stay within the community.

Ontario’s universities are working to help keep Ontario competitive and attractive to investment by:

- Developing highly skilled talent for in-demand jobs
- Creating a competitive advantage through research and innovation

Developing Highly Skilled Talent for In-Demand Jobs

When compared with other G7 countries, Canada’s critical skills shortage is undermining the country’s potential for growth.

In particular, Ontario – Canada’s economic powerhouse – is facing severe shortages in the skilled trades, apprenticeships and high-demand sectors, such as STEM, health care, education and community services. These are shortages that are only expected to grow.

A recent report conducted by Stokes Economics, Ontario Future Labour Force Needs Study, found that, over the next 10 years, Ontario will need more than 950,000 skilled trade and apprenticeship jobs, as well as a total of 928,700 jobs that require a university education.

These labour market projections are in addition to the critical gaps and unfilled positions Ontario faces today. According to the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, there are currently 350,000 unfilled jobs in Ontario.

More than 547,600 jobs requiring a university degree will be in the humanities and social sciences over the next 10 years, according to Stokes Economics. At the same time, 76% of employers report that, over the next three years, they will need to recruit talent with more specialized postsecondary degrees in STEM fields to address advances in technology.

Addressing shortages in both the skilled trades and highly skilled workforce will be critical to growing priority areas, such as housing, automotive and infrastructure, and to ensuring Ontario has the engineers, builders, consultants, computer scientists, educators and more who will advance Ontario’s industries for the future, while meeting today’s economic needs.
Moreover, as per Figure 3 above, employers are increasingly looking for specialized skills to help fill these gaps in the labour market. BHER’s 2022 skills survey found that when employers list the top skills they look for in candidates, they list specific skills, such as programming and software development, rather than generic terms, such as computer sciences or skilled trades.

Ontario’s universities continue to anticipate and respond to the changing needs of the workplace, leading the development of highly skilled talent – the next generation of innovative employers, creative entrepreneurs and nimble employees who will help strengthen community resilience, build new industries and make life-changing discoveries.

In fact, since 2010, universities have increased STEM enrolment by nearly 66 per cent and just over 35 per cent in health programs, according to Ontario’s universities’ enrolment data. Working with the province, universities are prepared to do more by expanding spaces in high-demand programs.

What’s more, students demonstrate interest in these programs year after year, as universities continue to see record applications to in-demand programs. The latest applications data indicates that Ontario secondary school applications increased by more than 11 per cent between 2020 and 2022, including nearly 23 per cent in nursing, nearly 19 per cent in biological and biomedical sciences, more than 13 per cent in engineering and more than 41 per cent in computer and informational science.

Ensuring universities are able to deliver programs and courses that will help the province meet the demand for these highly skilled workers will ensure Ontario can continue to drive innovation, rebuild its health-care system and attract investment.

Creating a Competitive Advantage through Research and Commercialization

In addition to highly skilled talent, research and innovation is critical for Ontario’s ability to drive economic growth.

The research ecosystem on university campuses is a vital contributor to Ontario’s research and innovation as a whole. University researchers partner with industry and key stakeholders in the public sector to:

• Fuel the innovation pipeline – from basic to applied research – to make the discoveries that improve quality of life, inform public policy, strengthen resilience, benefit Ontarians and drive a competitive economy.
• Advance key industries and develop new technologies by driving growth in high-demand fields, such as life sciences, critical minerals, electric vehicles and more

• Drive regional economic development and collaborate in research and development parks to commercialize ideas and attract investment

• Train the next generation of researchers and innovators through internships and work-integrated learning opportunities

University researchers continue to advance industries and make discoveries in high-growth sectors, such as clean technology. For example, as Ontario transitions from fossil fuels to cleaner energy sources, new technology will be needed to measure, test and sense these new energy sources. Researchers at one Ontario university are partnering with industry to develop, and eventually commercialize, sensing equipment that will enhance how hydrogen gas is stored, transported and managed, to help expand clean energy production opportunities.

Due to early investments in Ontario research, the province is a global leader in artificial intelligence (AI). Companies, such as Deep Genomics and Acerta Analytics Solutions, are examples of successful AI start-ups that began at one Ontario university.

It is critical that this important work can continue in order to produce the types of inventions that benefit all Ontarians and address some of the complex issues facing our global economy today.

More can be done to fully realize the potential of research and innovation in Ontario, as well as Canada. When comparing other G7 countries, Canada’s R&D spending and productivity growth are lagging behind. In fact, OECD estimates that among OECD countries, Canada will have the slowest GDP per capita growth from 2020 to 2030 and from 2030 to 2060.

More specifically, when comparing jurisdictions within Canada, Ontario’s ranking in research funding is well below that of Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia.

![Provincial research funding per student FTE, 2020-2021](chart)

Source: Canadian Association of University Business Officers (CAUBO); 2020–21 Enrolment Tables Statistics Canada (Table: 37-10-0011-01)
Competitive levels of provincial investment in research will ensure Ontario can retain the talent and foster the industry partnerships it needs to remain competitive on the national and international stage.

Further investment in university research and innovation – particularly by matching federal investments in university research facilities and programs – will improve Ontario’s commercialization outcomes and support more industry-research partnerships, as well as venture capital financing.

This, in turn, will help create the type of breakthroughs that make Ontario a global leader and our economy more self-sufficient.

**Taking Ideas to Market**

From curiosity-driven research to applied innovation, university research is being converted into tangible benefits for Ontarians and economic prosperity for Ontario.

To help safeguard Ontario against future pandemics, researchers at one Ontario university created chemical compounds that can neutralize the virus that causes COVID-19, several of its variants and other coronaviruses, such as SARS and MERS. The researchers have partnered with a biotech company to commercialize their research and help bring it to market as a universal therapeutic for targeting coronaviruses.

With a shared goal to help generate intellectual property (IP) for the benefit of Ontario’s people and regions, universities remain committed to working across sectors to improve commercialization outcomes.

As more municipalities look to mass timber as a low-carbon alternative to existing building materials, researchers at one Ontario university have partnered with local industry to develop an innovative mass timber structure that can resist fire for one hour without added protection – helping mitigate fire hazards associated with using mass timber. To date, the researchers have received a patent certificate from Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada with a patent pending in the United States.

Much of this work is done by Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs) that identify commercially viable IP and work to attract private-sector investment. Through this process, TTOs help move research into the private sector, ensuring homegrown ideas continue to strengthen Ontario’s capacity to grow and compete globally.

Ontario’s universities remain committed to driving innovation and improving commercialization outcomes across Ontario’s fast-growing sectors. In particular, from 2017-22, more than **720 start-ups** were created in the life sciences sector across 10 universities in Ontario, including **more than 300 student-originated start-ups**, according to COU data. Universities will continue to work with government and industry across all sectors to ensure both Ontario-made innovations, as well as inventions that are attracted to Ontario to scale and grow, continue to benefit Ontario.

As the global demand for electric vehicles (EVs) grows, automotive companies will need to ensure their vehicles are suitable for a range of climates and weather patterns. Researchers at one Ontario university are working with industry to support product development, research and testing to help bring more EVs to market sooner and ensure the safety of the vehicles across different climates.

By working together, we can think beyond what is possible today to develop the innovative solutions that will fuel local talent development and job creation throughout the province.
FUELING REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Whether they are agricultural powerhouses, popular tourism destinations, in urban centres or rural hubs, the cities and towns universities call home are feeling the impacts of change.

Many regions across Ontario are rebuilding and recovering. As they do, they are working to address local challenges, such as talent retention, or helping businesses adapt to new technologies and ways of working.

Ontario’s universities can and will help, serving as key economic drivers and industry partners, acting as large employers and local purchasers. Even beyond their hometowns and cities, the ripple effect of universities is felt in regions throughout the province.

Ontario’s universities will continue to help build social, economic and physical infrastructure across the province by:
• Driving economic growth in local communities
• Building the infrastructure that supports students and communities

Driving Economic Growth in Local Communities

Universities are often one of the top five employers in the region. In 2020, they collectively employed more than 138,600 Ontarians (Statistics Canada), and purchase approximately $5 billion in goods and services each year (data provided by the Council of Ontario Finance Officers), while students, faculty and staff contribute to local economies through spending and attracting visitors to the region.

Universities will continue to partner with organizations and businesses across their communities. These partnerships can be as community-oriented as university chefs working with local food organizations to help feed the region’s most vulnerable and address food insecurity, or as broad-reaching as a municipal partnership that is developing resilience planning to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, bolster the economy and improve social equity.

The Conference Board of Canada’s How Ontario Universities Benefit Regional Economies: Assessing the Regional Economic Impacts of Universities in Ontario found that spending activities from institutions, students, visitors and alumni have resulted in:
• 487,639 jobs impacted by universities’ spending activities
• $45 billion to the GDP
• At least $50.6 billion in GDP, resulting from the higher human capital development of alumni

Furthermore, the additional income of university graduates, equivalent to more than six per cent of Ontario’s GDP, according to the Conference Board of Canada, enables them to economically contribute to regions across Ontario in significant ways. These additional earnings support local jobs and economies and help community arts and culture thrive.

The regional economic impact of Ontario’s universities will be needed more than ever to ensure a path to prosperity for all of the province’s regions.
Building the Infrastructure that Supports Students and Communities

University infrastructure is often at the very heart of Ontario’s regions. The type of spaces found on campuses, such as community centres, gyms, pools, theatres and stadiums, bring people together, enrich the everyday experience for many Ontarians and help them live healthier lives.

Many small businesses and community members access innovative facilities where they can test ideas and scale operations, providing local industry with necessary resources to grow and recover from the pandemic.

The activities that take place at university facilities also provide spaces where students can learn in modern classrooms that will prepare them for in-demand jobs and the type of work valued by employers, while researchers can make discoveries that push the boundaries of knowledge and ultimately improve quality of life.

In addition to providing spaces for community members, businesses, students and researchers, building, maintaining and modernizing infrastructure creates jobs in construction, maintenance and more, fueling local workforces and associated supply chains.

The Facilities Renewal Program (FRP) is one program that provides important funding for university infrastructure through support for deferred maintenance projects, helping campuses maximize efficiencies, operate smarter and renew their facilities. But further investment in maintaining, retrofitting and building infrastructure is becoming more critical.

The Auditor General has noted that the serious backlog of deferred maintenance for universities – costing nearly $4.6 billion (Facilities Condition Assessment Program, 2021) – needs to be addressed through long-term planning.

While universities account for approximately 82 per cent of the postsecondary sector’s $5.6-billion backlog in repairs, they only receive 56 per cent of provincial funding. The FRP makes up a fraction of the cost needed to keep pace with basic repairs.
REBUILDING ONTARIO’S HEALTH-CARE SYSTEM

Ontario’s health-care system is under tremendous strain, leading to widespread staffing shortages, increased wait times and the closing of emergency departments.

The province needs a strong health-care workforce, as well as innovation in health care, life sciences and medical technologies to rebuild the system and ensure Ontario is prepared for future shocks and pressures.

Ontario’s universities will continue to work with government and stakeholders to help address these challenges in the immediate and longer term.

Universities are helping Ontario rebuild its health-care system by:
- Supplying a highly skilled health workforce
- Developing Ontario-made innovations in health care and biomedical technology

Supplying A Highly Skilled Health Workforce

Between now and 2030, Ontario will need nearly 148,000 job openings within the health-care sector that require a university education, according to Stokes Economics. These labour market projections are in addition to the critical gaps and unfilled positions that Ontario faces today.

Further compounding this growing challenge is the fact that many doctors, nurses and other health-care professionals are experiencing burnout, while emergency rooms and hospitals are stretched to the limit, as the province balances an increasing backlog of elective surgeries, diagnostic tests and routine procedures with urgent patient needs.

A 2021 report released by Ontario’s Financial Accountability Office estimates that it will take more than three years to eliminate the backlogs and cost approximately $1.3 billion.

A strong pipeline of highly skilled health-care professionals can help address the labour shortage and backlog within the health-care system.

For example, to help with the surge in demand at Ontario’s hospitals, Ontario’s universities, working with the province, have put out a call to health-care students, which has led to more than 40 nursing students joining the Children’s Hospital in Eastern Ontario, alone.

Ontario’s universities are developing this in-demand talent through unique programs and collaborations. They are ensuring students are ready to meet the critical care needs of Ontario’s patients both today and into the future.

For example, Ontario’s nursing programs are developing additional pathways to graduate nurses with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing in as little as 19 months. In addition, programs are streaming students into high-needs clinical areas, such as critical care and long-term care, as part of their clinical placements to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to practice in these areas after graduation.

Nurse Practitioner education in Ontario is largely delivered by an efficient and cost-effective consortium of nine universities. It is a vital component in ensuring essential and high-quality health care can be accessed in long-term care, rural, remote and Northern communities, as well as Francophone, Indigenous and vulnerable urban populations.
From investments in medical school and residency positions to growing the number of domestic and internationally educated nurses working in the system, Ontario’s universities welcome recent investments in the health-care workforce.

But more can be done to ensure our health-care system has the highly skilled workforce it needs to rebuild, address backlogs and deliver high-quality care to all Ontarians.

Universities are already seeing increasing interest in, and record-high applications to, health-care programs offered at universities. They have also put forward a plan to further expand nursing positions in Ontario to help address the critical shortage of nurses.

Applications data indicates that Ontario secondary school applications to health professions and related programs at universities increased by more than 33% between 2020 and 2022. In addition, during this same timeframe, all applications to Ontario university nursing education programs have increased by 35%.

Since 2020, applications to nurse practitioner programs at Ontario’s universities increased by 60%. In addition, from 2020 to 2021, applications to Ontario Medical Schools went up by 10%.

Further investing in and growing these critical programs will help ensure the province has the supply of health-care talent it needs to respond to the immediate and future needs of the health-care system.

**Ontario-Made Innovations in Health Care and Biomedical Technology**

Innovative solutions that make health-care delivery more accessible and effective are critical to ensuring the province has the resources it needs to protect against future outbreaks.

Throughout the pandemic, Ontario’s universities played an active role in conducting ground-breaking research and making the types of discoveries that are helping the treatment, outcome modelling, testing and vaccine development of COVID-19.

Due to increased workloads during the pandemic, many hospital workers began to experience burnout. In response, researchers at one Ontario university built smart scheduling software that can help prevent over-scheduling of hospital staff, in partnership with Mesh Scheduling Inc., a Kingston organization that specializes in scheduling software. The collaboration is helping scale Mesh Scheduling Inc.’s software.

University research and industry partnerships were also at the forefront of addressing Ontario’s personal protective equipment (PPE) shortage. These collaborations resulted in retooled industries that helped provide much-needed PPE and resources to essential workers and made Ontario more self-sufficient.

As the demand for PPE increased significantly during the onset of the pandemic, a research team at one Ontario university pivoted manufacturing efforts to help prototype critical PPE and supplies for Ontario’s hospitals and health-care facilities, such as ventilators, face shields and COVID-19 test kit components. The team went from idea to production in three weeks and continued to work in partnership with local hospitals and local industry to create solutions to new health-care challenges.

These types of advances in health-focused research will continue to be crucial to the future of our health-care system.

As the government implements its Five-Point Plan, outlined in its Plan to Stay Open: Health System Stability and Recovery, Ontario’s universities remain committed to supporting this plan by helping fill critical labour gaps, while conducting ground-breaking research that improves quality of life and ensures each individual has access to strong and reliable care across the province.

By working together, Ontario will emerge from this crisis resilient with a clear path forward to rebuild its health-care system for the benefit of all Ontarians.

These types of advances in health-focused research will continue to be crucial to the future of our health-care system.
STRENGTHENING A UNIVERSITY SECTOR IN TRANSFORMATION

Successful students, leading-edge innovation and strong community partnerships are vital for a strong Ontario.

Ontario’s universities remain committed to continuous transformation to meet the ever-changing and evolving needs of students, their communities and the province.

As change and disruption continues to touch every industry and sector across Ontario, the university sector is no exception. Higher education is entering a new era. The education landscape includes emerging technologies, new online learning opportunities, funding challenges, rising costs and shifting demographics.

To keep pace with these changes, Ontario’s universities are transforming. They continue to demonstrate their ability to remain nimble, adapting and pivoting programs and services to meet the needs of a changing student body and labour market. They are also doing more with less by adopting innovative ways to reduce red tape and streamline processes that have resulted in significant cost-savings.

To continue to serve the needs of Ontario’s students and communities, universities have embraced transformation by continuing to modernize and adapt their course offerings to help workers who are looking to reskill and upskill find the opportunities they need to succeed through micro-credential, short-duration and continuing education programs.

Ontario’s universities offer more than 4,300 continuing education courses and have entered into more than 670 industry partnerships that help fill local, regional and provincial skills shortages, according to COU data. In fact, just under 120,000 students were enrolled in these programs at universities in 2020-21 – an increase of 28% since 2017-18.

Ontario’s universities continue to find efficiencies and cost-savings, such as:

• University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP): Provides international students with access to comparable OHIP health coverage, reducing the costs to universities and students.

• Ontario Education Collaborative Marketplace (OECM): Works with universities and other broader public-sector organizations to take advantage of savings through central agreements.

• Canadian Shared Security Operations Centre (CanSSOC): Partnership between universities to investigate how shared services can enable greater visibility and mitigation of cybersecurity threats.

• New Digital Tools and Wallets for Students: MyCreds is a 24/7 digital credential wallet that allows for secure issuing and verification of official digital documents, including transcripts, degrees, diplomas, micro-credentials and badges, through a shared service model.
Additionally, as outlined in the beginning of this report, to help equip students for the new realities and complexities of a changing social and economic landscape, universities continue to adapt their programming to meet student needs. This includes offering work-integrated and interdisciplinary learning opportunities in STEM, humanities and more, as well as providing additional resources and support systems for student mental health and well-being.

As universities continue to innovate, transform and support students, communities and the province, investing in a high-quality university sector over the long-term will ensure they can continue to make their fullest contribution to a world that is rapidly changing.

In fact, universities have demonstrated their commitment to strong university financial transparency and accountability and have launched a new web portal on open data, leading practices in governance and new metrics for financial health and transparency.

However, unfunded Ontario students, declining real operating grants, a 10% tuition cut in 2019 and ongoing freeze, as well as inordinate delays in international student visa approvals that have an immediate financial impact of more than $100 million this year, are eroding the sector’s ability to deliver on universities’ mission to support students, communities and the province.

Currently, provincial grants account for 30.9 per cent of total university operating revenue and universities in Ontario receive the lowest per-student government funding in Canada.

The tuition cut and freeze alone has cost the sector $1.86 billion between 2019–20 and 2021–22. An additional year of a freeze means universities have forgone an additional $867 million in revenue in 2022–23 and will forego up to $997 million in 2023–24.

Increasing investments in the sector and a commitment to enhancing university education is critical to ensuring universities remain able to support students; develop a highly skilled and adaptable workforce; strengthen industries, businesses and communities; drive ground-breaking innovation and help restore Ontario’s competitive economy.

Ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of Ontario’s universities means universities can continue to support students, deliver high-demand programs, foster research and innovation and drive economic growth in communities throughout Ontario.

It is now more important than ever for government and universities to work together to allow Ontario’s universities to build the better and brighter future for our province that we all want to see.
FURTHER READING

Partnering to Increase Access to Student Housing:
https://ontariosuniversities.ca/reports/partnering-to-increase-access-to-student-housing

Partnering to Help Municipalities Build Climate-Resilient Communities:
https://ontariosuniversities.ca/reports/partnering-to-help-municipalities-build-climate-resilient-communities

Ministry of Colleges and Universities’ Graduate Survey:
https://ontariosuniversities.ca/reports/graduate-survey

Reskilling and Upskilling Ontario’s Workforce:
https://ontariosuniversities.ca/reports/reskilling-and-upskilling-ontarios-workforce

Partnering to Develop a Highly Skilled Workforce:
https://ontariosuniversities.ca/reports/partnering-to-develop-a-highly-skilled-workforce-supplementary-report