

Safeguarding the Future by Protecting Students

**CASA's Advocacy Priorities During
the COVID-19 Pandemic**



CASA | ACAE

Canadian Alliance of Student Associations
Alliance canadienne des associations étudiantes

Background

The Canadian Alliance of Student Associations is a national voice for Canadian post-secondary students composed of student associations representing undergraduate, graduate, college, and polytechnic students. CASA works to provide students with a post-secondary system that is accessible, affordable, innovative, and of the highest quality. The COVID-19 pandemic poses significant challenges to Canada as an entire country and its students are being uniquely impacted by it as well. Across Canada students are worried about their education, finances, and employment prospects.

CASA has worked to identify areas where students need further support to assist them through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Priority Areas

Establishment of Emergency Income Supports for Students

For many students, the ability to work part-time during the school year or full-time during the summer months is an important part of the student life cycle. Each student has their own unique funding arrangement often consisting of employment income, student financial assistance, or parental contributions. The COVID-19 pandemic is creating a situation where employment income for summer of 2020 will not be a reality for far too many students in Canada. CASA firmly believes that if student sources of income are shut

down for the entire summer, that the Government of Canada has an obligation to supplement the incomes of students through this time. The Government of Canada is providing financial aid to many Canadians through the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit, and a student stream that would assist students and new graduates who lost their ability to work. A student stream of the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit would help mitigate the financial strain of students in these coming months.

Student Financial Aid Amendments

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many post-secondary students are going to return to study in September with significantly less resources available to them than they would usually have. This means that Canada's student financial aid system is going to be much more flexible than it has in previous years when it comes to assessing how much aid a student will need to go to school. One area of concern is a student's assumed contributions to their student loans. Students in Canada are typically required to provide between \$1,500 and \$3,000 to their assessed level of need. When students have access to summer employment, this assumed

contribution ensures students are contributing some to their own education. In the context of COVID-19, students are going to need the full value of their assessed needs.

Additionally, the Government of Canada needs to ensure that cash strapped students feel economically safe enough to return to study and pay for tuition. Canada Student Grants provide up-front, non-repayable student financial aid to students from low and middle income families. Expansions to Canada Student Grants would be helpful for many students worried about paying for tuition.

Lifting International Student Travel Restrictions

International students are an important part of Canadian campuses. They provide immense value to the social fabric of a campus community and pay a high value for the education they receive, contributing over \$10 billion to the Canadian economy while doing it.¹ For this, international students deserve access to a high quality

education. That being said, current border restrictions could prevent new students from coming to Canada in September and may have long term impacts on international students staying in Canada after study. When September comes, international students should be allowed to enter the country for study purposes.

Research Extensions for Students

With the closure of campuses all across Canada, many student researchers are having their work put on hold. Canada has 2,500 Master's students, 5,000 PhD students, and 700 post-doctoral fellows at any given time working on campuses across the country.² Student research funding is available for fixed periods of time. With

campuses closed, including many labs, many student researchers' work is effectively put on hold, through no fault of their own. CASA believes student researchers who had their research paused should not be penalized for this and should have the length of their research grants extended for the amount of time they have had to pause their work.

Recommendations

Canada's students need support from the federal government during this time. To address the concerns outlined, CASA recommends the federal government do the following:

- » CASA recommends that the federal government immediately establish a Canadian Emergency Response Benefit stream for students and new graduates. This stream of the CERB should apply to any student enrolled in a publicly funded post-secondary institution in the 2019-2020 academic year.
- » CASA recommends that the federal government increase the Canada Student Grant for low- and middle-income students by 40%, from \$3,000 to \$4,200 per academic year.

- » CASA recommends that the federal government waive the requirement for the fixed student contribution for any student applying for financial assistance for the 2020-2021 academic year.
- » CASA recommends that the federal government permit international students to travel to Canada for postsecondary education by allowing anyone with a valid study permit to cross the border for enrolment in classes for September 2020.
- » CASA recommends that the research period and deadlines for student research funding issued by Canada's Granting Agencies be extended, at minimum, to the equivalent time of the federal government's call for social distancing.

1 Economic Impact of International Education in Canada – 2017 Update. Final Report. May 2017. <https://www.international.gc.ca/education/report-rapport/impact-2017/index.aspx?lang=eng>, Global Affairs Canada.

2 Funding Decisions," Canadian Institutes of Health Research, <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/38021.html>; "Funding Decisions," Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/nserc-crsng/fundingdecisions-decisionsfinancement/index_eng.asp; "Competition Results," Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, <http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/results-resultats/index-eng.aspx>.

Our Members



About CASA

Established in 1995, the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) is a non-partisan, not-for-profit, student organization composed of 23 student associations representing 280,000 post-secondary students from coast to coast. Through its partnership with the Quebec Students Union (QSU), CASA presents a national student voice to the federal government. CASA advocates for a Canadian post-secondary education system that is accessible, affordable, innovative and of the highest quality.



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