



Executive Summary

As we approach the 2027 federal budget, it is imperative to address the pressing needs of students at the Acadia Student's Union (ASU) while aligning our recommendations with the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) pre-budget submission. The ASU is proud to partner with CASA to advocate with, and for, students across Canada. This submission provides local context that highlights the urgency of CASA proposals.

This brief highlights key areas of concern, including Canada Student Financial Aid, housing needs and post-graduate employment. As Budget 2027 approaches, students are faced with a rapidly evolving job market and increasing need for support. The experiences and recommendations provided in this report reflect ASU students' voices, research from colleagues at other universities, and the work of student-led organizations, including Students Nova Scotia and CASA. The ASU urges the government to invest in students across Canada—because an investment in students is an investment into the future.

Student Experiences

Housing

When surveyed, Acadia students ranked housing as their number one concern. This data tracks across multiple findings: 48% of Nova Scotian students who said they have missed classes identified housing instability as an academic barrier (Healey, 2026). Student homelessness has alarmingly increased across the country: as many as 100,000 post-secondary students experience some form of homelessness nationally (Nova Scotia Community College, 2026).

Experiences of couch surfing and living in vehicles have been reflected on Acadia's campus. One student shared, "I've been homeless multiple times. Most recently I was only able to scrape together enough cash to pay for my winter residence by \$200. If I was \$250 less lucky, I would've been homeless again."

These problems are made worse by Nova Scotia's costly rental market: as of July 2026, the Province had the most expensive apartment and condo rental prices, averaging \$2,377 per month (Rentals.ca & Urbanation, 2026). The Town of Wolfville, where Acadia is located, has a median total income of \$31,200 before taxes as reported by the 2021 census (StatsCan, 2021) with rental prices averaging \$1,375/month for a studio apartment, not including utilities (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2025).

The partnership between the ASU and Student Housing Nova Scotia (SHNS) has alleviated some of this burden. SHNS "provides, develops, and advocates for housing that meets the needs of post-secondary students across Nova Scotia." (Student Housing Nova Scotia, 2026). In May of 2026, SHNS purchased 48 additional units in Wolfville, with at least 30% of those units being available for below market rate (Wang, 2026). SHNS mirrors other successful governmental collaborations, including recent investments into student housing in Montreal with UTILE (Housing, infrastructure and Communities Canada, 2026). Continued collaboration with non-profits and investment in affordable student housing allows for stability and academic success for students across Canada.

Financial support and the CFSA

Canada Student Grants and loans are a pillar of economic support for students across Nova Scotia and the country: in 2023-2024, Nova Scotian students received 74.7 million dollars in funds through Canada Student Grants. Over 18,000 students received funding through Canada student Loans, totaling 185.5 million dollars (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2026). When surveyed, 50% of respondents stated that they fund their education through provincial grants or loans. The need for a fulsome CFSA program is evident.

The issue arises when CFSA can no longer provide for the students that need them. One student stated: "Tuition costs and the cost of living are rising, yet loans and grants being given out do not reflect this increase in prices, leaving larger funding gaps that students have to find a way to fill."

CFSA levels for both grants and loans have been temporarily increased to \$5000 maximum for grants and \$300 a week for loans, but there is no guarantee that this will remain without consistent advocacy. Nova Scotia's student aid levels are also struggling to keep pace with the cost of living, with the loan maximum staying stagnant at \$200 per week. The last adjustment to weekly student financial aid maximums was a \$20 increase in 2017. These pressures are compounded by some of the highest tuition rates in Canada: In 2025-26, domestic undergraduate students in Nova Scotia paid an average of \$11,187 in tuition – approximately 25% higher than the national average (StatsCan, 2026).

In the words of another student: "I can hardly afford university and student loans don't even cover 100% of the tuition costs."

Post-Graduate employment

Students no longer feel like their post-secondary education guarantees stability. In July of 2026, youth unemployment in those aged 16-24 remains steady at 12.6% (StatsCan, 2026). Nova Scotia reflects this trend, with the rate of unemployment of 15-24 year olds at 12.1% in 2024 (Labour Market Information, (n.d.)). For equity-deserving groups, the issue is compounded by systemic, sustained barriers to employment (Fowler and Pakula, 2021).

There is added difficulty for a large proportion of students who pay for their education out of pocket or through loans. Post-graduate employment is not only meant for a life immediately after graduation: it's the ability to pay for their education. As a student explained: "it is important for me to find work opportunities that can both help me pay tuition and build experience for future opportunities."

One alleviating factor in the post-graduate employment search is the Student Work Placement Program (SWPP). SWPP is a federal government initiative to encourage Work-Integrated-Learning (WIL) opportunities for post-secondary students. Students who participate in WIL are given the skills and opportunity to succeed in the workplace before they graduate, increasing their employability and boosting their earning potential by 7% when they do find employment (Jackson 2014; StatsCan, 2020).

Recommendations

Maintain the value of the Canada Student Grant Program by permanently increasing the maximum grant levels to \$5000, and increasing maximum loan levels to \$360 per week indexed in real 2025 dollars.

By increasing the weekly and total maximum CFSA amounts, students are no longer forced into precarity each year. Students can instead focus on skill development, which creates a more productive and well-prepared future workforce. The ASU, as aligned with CASA, understands the immense return on

investment when students are given the resources to succeed. Loans themselves should remain interest free to help minimize the impact of student debt.

Extend funding for the Student Work Placement Program (SWPP) and re-introduce increased subsidies within the program for the hiring of equity-deserving students.

Budget 2025 announced 635.2 million allocated to SWPP over three years, supporting 55,000 student work placements for the 2026-27 academic year. The 55,000 jobs supported will decrease after the 2026-27 academic year, removing high-quality positions from the youth employment pool. This is directly aligned with CASA's concerns and those of Students' Nova Scotia.

The removal of subsidies aimed specifically at equity-deserving groups is concerning, and the ASU urges the government to consider the consistent barriers to employment for equity deserving students and reinstate the subsidies.

Create a Canada Student Housing Strategy through Build Canada Homes, including \$1 billion in grants and loans to support the development of student residences and non-profit student housing.

Residences are often students' first experience with independent housing. Proximity to campus and resources increases quality of life, and residences have the potential to be a lower-cost form of socially controlled housing (Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, 2025). The ASU, as aligned with CASA, wants to see \$700 million to revitalize existing residences across Canada, with \$300 million of that funding used in a zero-interest loan fund to build non-profit and cooperative housing (Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, 2025). A \$5 million portion should be spent on Indigenous housing and residences; housing projects must emphasize community and care for Indigenous students.

The government pledged in their 2025 platform to prioritize student and senior housing within Build Canada Homes. This investment builds on existing provincial successes with non-profit housing in Quebec and Nova Scotia and opens doors for developing quality housing projects for students across Canada.

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