



**Universities  
Canada.**

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# Securing Canada's Future:

## Building made-in-Canada talent, research and infrastructure

Universities Canada's submission to the  
House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance

August 2025



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# Universities Canada urges the federal government to:

## A. Attract the top talent Canada needs to secure our future

1. Streamline visa processing to attract and retain global talent
2. Establish a national ministerial roundtable on talent, skills and immigration strategy
3. Restore Canada's brand

## B. Boost Canada's economy

1. Launch a research talent strategy anchored in system-wide support
2. Follow through on Budget 2024 commitments
3. Engage research stakeholders to maximize impact
4. Expand infrastructure and industry-aligned research capacity

## C. Build the housing and infrastructure Canada needs

1. Expand support for student housing to ease local pressures
2. Open federal infrastructure programs to university-led projects





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## Securing Canada's future: Investing in made in Canada talent, innovation and infrastructure

Our country's success is built on a promise to all Canadians: that a better life is within reach for anyone willing to work hard and contribute to their community.

The hard work of securing Canada's future can't wait and Canada's universities are rolling up their sleeves bringing solutions to the table. Vital, innovative and deeply rooted in communities, universities are ready to tackle Canada's biggest economic challenges.

But years of underfunding, rising costs and inflation have left universities stretched thin, yet expected to do more with less. The result? Closed doors to opportunity, weakened communities and lost talent.

There is no credible path to securing Canada's economic future without a strong commitment to research and universities. Canada cannot grow the strongest economy in the G7 without them.

Now is the time for Canada's new government to lead with purpose and urgency. That starts with bold investments in made-in-Canada research and talent.

# Attract the top talent Canada needs to secure our future

To secure long-term prosperity and strengthen Canada's foothold in international markets, the federal government must take smart coordinated actions to develop, retain and attract top global talent. That means aligning immigration policy with workforce and commercialization goals by bringing in international talent and building domestic skills to drive economic growth. Yet visa delays and shifting policies are causing top talent to look elsewhere.

Consider this: Many of the international students caught in this broken system are already part of our communities, graduating from Canadian high schools, working on cutting-edge research or preparing to fill essential roles.

Now is the time to reset our approach and strike the right balance between attracting top global talent and developing Canadian students' skills so we can meet urgent workforce needs and build a more prosperous, competitive Canada. Universities Canada is advocating for clear, predictable immigration policy and stronger coordination across governments, institutions and industry, so that even under the current federal cap on international student permits, the best and brightest can continue choosing Canada.

## Proposed policy solutions

### 1. Streamline visa processing to attract and retain global talent

Improved visa processing is essential to ensure that Canada remains a top and competitive destination for international students and researchers and to allow Canada to quickly integrate skilled graduates into the workforce.

Currently, Canada's visa processing times are threatening our ability to attract top researchers, students and professionals at a time when global competition for talent is intensifying. Compared to peer nations like the UK (three weeks) and New Zealand (two to four weeks), Canada is falling behind. This directly undermines the Prime Minister's commitment to grow our economy.

Urgent action is required to fix this problem. As the national voice of Canada's universities, we are calling for a fair, transparent and predictable process that

prioritizes responsible institutions, those with strong admissions standards, ethical recruitment practices and robust student supports.

### 2. Establish a national ministerial roundtable on talent, skills and immigration strategy

Canada needs clarity and better coordination that reflects regional realities. That is why we are urging the federal government to establish a ministerial roundtable on international student and talent strategy. This roundtable should bring together key federal departments, including Employment and Social Development Canada, Global Affairs Canada, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, along with provincial and territorial governments, industry and the post-secondary sector.

We need a system that aligns immigration policy with workforce, productivity

and economic goals. One that attracts top international talent while building the domestic skills needed to drive economic growth.

### 3. Restore Canada's brand

Canada's global brand as a destination for top talent has taken a hit and we're already feeling the consequences. Our members are struggling to fill open seats and attract the highly skilled individuals our country urgently needs.

Restoring international trust in Canada as a top destination for learning, research and opportunity is a core federal responsibility. After 18 months of uncertainty, it's time for the federal government to lead with clarity, purpose and ambition, rebuilding Canada's reputation through decisive, coordinated and government-led brand efforts that reinforce our identity as a trusted education partner and global hub of excellence.

# Boost Canada's economy

Universities are ready to help solve Canada's biggest challenges. From labour shortages and housing to nation-building projects and defence, they are practical partners. Across the country, universities are already working with government and industry to deliver real, lasting solutions. They conduct cutting-edge research, train highly skilled workers and help bring new technologies to market. They are leading breakthroughs in AI, quantum computing, cybersecurity, critical minerals and carbon capture that are reshaping global industries and helping Canadian companies to compete.

But to fully seize this opportunity, Canada needs a clear strategy to align university research, talent development with industry needs and to attract top global talent that can help deliver the long-term investments needed to build a strong, united economy.

## Proposed policy solutions

### 1. Launch a research talent strategy anchored in system-wide support

Canada must act quickly to attract top global researchers, especially in light of U.S. policy shifts on science. A new research talent strategy should offer competitive scholarships and fellowships for early career researchers. To succeed, recruitment funding must be paired with increased core investments in Canada's research ecosystem that build on Budget 2024 commitments to support infrastructure, retain domestic talent and strengthen discovery across all institutions.

### 2. Follow through on Budget 2024 commitments

Budget 2024 included a much-needed boost to graduate scholarships and postdoctoral fellowships through the granting councils, new funding for research infrastructure and

a commitment to modernize Canada's science ecosystem through a new Capstone Agency. These measures begin to implement key recommendations from the Advisory Panel on the Federal Research Support System to fund research at a globally competitive level. As Canada pursues greater economic independence, now is the time to accelerate investment in top talent and breakthrough research.

### 3. Engage research stakeholders to maximize impact

To unlock the full potential of the Capstone Agency and BOREALIS, the federal government must work directly with Canada's research leaders. Engaging Universities Canada and key stakeholders early and often will ensure these initiatives are grounded in real-world expertise, built for impact and aligned with Canada's long-term goals for infrastructure, artificial intelligence, defence, industrial policies and workforce development.

### 4. Expand infrastructure and industry-aligned research capacity

Top talent can only thrive in a well-equipped, connected research ecosystem. Strategic investments in research infrastructure — such as AI computing, RNA platforms and public data ecosystems — along with new industry-aligned research chairs, will ensure that the talent in our universities is integrated into Canada's industrial economy. This stronger integration also accelerates commercialization, enhances intellectual property outcomes and drives the productivity gains industry partners value. A strong majority of industry partners say academic partnerships enhance their performance, with 62 per cent citing increased performance and 50 per cent pointing to improved productivity.

# Build the housing and infrastructure Canada needs

To build a stronger, more competitive economy and respond to urgent housing and productivity challenges, Canada must unlock the full potential of Canada's universities. State-of-the-art labs help attract top researchers and build up Canada's AI infrastructure. Student housing is alleviating housing pressures by providing over 135,000 students with affordable accommodation. Local communities, including families and seniors, benefit from campus amenities like recreational spaces, clinics, child-care and libraries. Universities help sustain critical infrastructure, supporting water systems, roads, bridges and local transit. In many communities daily use by students, faculty and staff keeps public transportation like buses and light rail viable for the entire community.

To drive economic growth and meet urgent housing and productivity challenges, Canada needs smart infrastructure investments that deliver long-term public value for tax dollars. A strong federal partner can help turn plans into projects, fast.

## Proposed policy solutions

### 1. Expand support for student housing to ease local pressures

Student housing expansions are stalled by rising construction costs, rigid borrowing rules and limited access to federal programs. The federal government should simplify access to funding for student housing projects to help universities build and maintain residences that ease local housing pressures. This includes ensuring the announced \$2 billion for student and senior housing under the Build Canada Homes plan is allocated in a way that accounts for provincial borrowing restrictions and institutional financial constraints — prioritizing grants over loans where needed. Funding should also support innovative projects like mixed-use developments and building refurbishments. Additionally, the government should expand access

through dedicated student housing streams in existing federal programs and work with provinces to cut red tape and fast-track approvals.

### 2. Open federal infrastructure programs to university-led projects

Canada needs its own answers in clean energy, biotech, advanced manufacturing and AI to stay strong against higher tariffs and falling productivity, but universities can't upgrade their aging labs because they're left out of federal building programs. Decades of underinvestment have pushed university infrastructure to a critical point. The national maintenance backlog now exceeds \$17.2 billion — with over a third of projects deemed urgent. The Knowledge Infrastructure Program — a federal program in

collaboration with provinces and territories — showed how strategic campus investments create jobs, fix old facilities and boost research. Reviving a program like this would put people to work, clear maintenance backlogs and give students and researchers the modern spaces they need — delivering lasting value for taxpayers, local communities and Canada's economy.



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## Conclusion

Canada cannot afford to lose ground in the global race for talent, research and innovation. Policy uncertainty, rising costs and an unpredictable immigration system are putting our competitiveness at risk and limiting the potential of our universities to deliver on national priorities.

At the same time, the pressure on universities is increasing. Financial constraints, aging infrastructure and unpredictable immigration policies are making it harder to deliver the world-class education Canadians deserve, attract global talent and support the industries that drive our economy forward.

This is more than a funding challenge, it's a growing risk to Canada's promise. Without sustained and predictable investment, universities will face growing barriers to delivering the skilled talent, research and innovation our economy depends on. To fulfill Canada's promise, we must ensure they have the tools to educate the next generation, build domestic capacity and drive long-term prosperity.



### About Universities Canada

Universities Canada is the voice of Canadian universities. We are a membership organization providing universities with a unified voice for higher education, research and innovation. Universities Canada advances the mission of our member institutions to transform lives, strengthen communities and find solutions to the world's most pressing challenges.



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