

Myth Buster

The elimination of tuition

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION: OUR TIME TO ACT

Over 80 countries around the world provide some level of free post-secondary education. More than 20 provide free post-secondary education to all their citizens. Yet in Canada, tuition fees are increasing year after year. There's no reason why Canada can't eliminate tuition fees as well. Don't fall for these common arguments as to why we can't have free post-secondary education (PSE) in Canada.

Myth: Free education is a luxury we can't afford.

Reality: In Canada, it is widely accepted that education from kindergarten to Grade 12 is a social and economic necessity that should be publicly funded. So why should education suddenly become a luxury just because a student passes the age of 18, especially in an era where the majority of jobs require some level of PSE? Canada also has plenty of fiscal room to spend more on PSE. The federal government's transfer for PSE is currently only 0.2% of GDP. It's a matter of choice, not affordability.

Myth: Because more children from wealthy families attend PSE, free education subsidizes wealthy kids at the expense of students from low income families.

Reality: One reason children from low income families are less likely to pursue PSE is because they find it challenging to navigate the current complex system of grants, high personal debt loads, and part-time jobs. Eliminating tuition fees makes it easier for students from low income families to go to college or university. Students from higher income families, meanwhile, will pay for the cost of their education through our system of progressive taxation, which, unlike tuition, is actually based on ability to pay.

Myth: If we make education free, we'll end up paying for people taking useless degrees to "pursue their passion."

Reality: Education is about much more than preparing for a career; people should be able to pursue personal development through PSE. But higher education also develops transferable skills in students: they learn to think for themselves, to express themselves, to embrace curiosity, to practice new skills, to work cooperatively and effectively with others. These are skills that will benefit individuals in their communities and in the workplace. In fact, employers have identified the need for these kinds of soft skills as one of the biggest "skills gaps" facing Canada.

Myth: Because graduates make more money, PSE represents an individual benefit that should be paid for by individuals.

Reality: Post-secondary education is not simply a matter of individual benefits. There are social and economic benefits to having a well-educated population. And it's true that on average, post-secondary graduates earn more than high school graduates and the financial benefits of PSE are unevenly distributed. But some post-secondary graduates will end up earning less than high school graduates while still dealing with enormous debt loads. Having graduates pay for the cost of education through their taxes is fairer and more progressive.

Myth: We can't have free tuition in Canada because PSE falls under provincial jurisdiction.

Reality: Health care also falls under provincial jurisdiction and yet we still have a universal medicare program that provides healthcare to all Canadian citizens. Much like with health care, the federal government can work with the provinces and territories to fund PSE without requiring user fees in the form of tuition and other fees.