

**National
Professional Association
Coalition on Tuition**



**Coalition des associations
professionnelles nationales
sur les frais de scolarité**

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Canadian Medical
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**SUBMISSION TO THE

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON FINANCE**

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Ottawa, Ontario

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Madame Chair, and Distinguished Members of the Standing Committee on Finance,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today about Canada's fiscal priorities, specifically, with regard to post secondary education for all Canadians. On behalf of the members of the National Professional Association Coalition on Tuition (NPACT), I wish to commend the federal government for its ongoing commitment to engaging in meaningful dialogue with individual citizens and groups such as ours on issues of vital importance to the economic prosperity and future of Canada.

NPACT is a unique group. We comprise membership from a diverse range of national, respected professional organizations, including but not limited to the Canadian Bar Association and Canadian Nurses Association, as well as the Canadian Medical Association. In total, we consist of 8 professional associations representing architecture, dentistry, law, medicine, nursing, pharmacy, physiotherapy and veterinary medicine. The Canadian Federation of Students is also a member. We joined together as NPACT in May 2000 out of shared, considerable concern that high post secondary tuition fees in professional programs create barriers to access to post secondary education and, as a consequence, threaten the supply of professionals required to serve the needs of the Canadian public.

As this Committee undergoes the challenging task of determining priority financial issues for this country, we urge you to: (1) ensure regulated and reasonable tuition fees by increasing funding of postsecondary institutions to alleviate some of the pressures driving tuition fee increases; and (2) to expand financial support systems for students, particularly in the form of needs-based grants.

Did You Know?

At this point, I would like to provide a few facts about professional programs of which you may not be aware.

- Many professional programs, such as law, dentistry and medicine, are second-entry programs. This means that completion of a 3 or 4-year degree is usually a mandatory *prerequisite* to admission; as such, students entering or even considering these programs do so with a debt load already accumulated during several years of nonprofessional studies. In addition, because these students are pursuing a second degree, many are in their mid to late 20s and have families, mortgages and other expenses.
- Since 1980, medical school tuition costs in Ontario have increased by almost 880%, more than twice as fast as the general cost of living. [Reference: Ontario Medical Association.]
- In Ontario, first year tuition and compulsory fees at its 5 medical schools averaged \$14 800 in 2001/2002.
- First year tuition fees in medicine at the University of British Columbia will increase by more than 66% from the 2001/2002 academic year to \$6 545 per annum in 2002/2003.
- In Manitoba, Dentistry program tuition fees will be nearly \$14 000 this academic year, not including costs for instruments.
- During 2002/2003, tuition fees in Pharmacy will be \$ 9 371 at the University of Toronto.
- At Dalhousie University in Halifax, undergraduate fees will be \$8 800 per annum in both the Dentistry and Medicine programs for the 2002/2003 academic year.
- At the Atlantic Veterinary College at the University of PEI, this year's tuition fees will be \$7 100 per annum.

WHAT IS THE "COST" OF HIGH TUITION FEES TO THE CANADIAN PUBLIC?

Influence on Practice Choice and Location

What also needs to be considered is the high cost of tuition fees to the broad Canadian public, including its influence on practice choice and location.

As you may know, the University of Toronto Law school is promoting a 5-year plan to raise fees from \$12 000 to \$22 000 in 2006. This proposal sparked an outcry from Hal Jackman, Chancellor of the University of Toronto, who remarked in the *National Post* this past June, “The argument that [the law school is] making is that by increasing tuition fees and providing more student aid, it increases access, and I think I have some questions about the logic of that statement. If you want to make the place more accessible, you lower fees, not increase them.”

Chancellor Jackman went on to say that he is worried average Canadians will not have access to University of Toronto graduates – among the country’s best legal minds -- because they will be working at corporate law firms with high legal fees. In short, he is concerned they will not be able to provide legal services to the average person.

In addition to law graduates, we should also be concerned about what will happen to the “best minds” in medicine and other professions. A study published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal (CMAJ)* this year found that, compared with 4th year medical Ontario students, first year students were more likely to cite financial considerations as having a **major influence** on specialty choice or practice location. [Reference: “*Effects of rising tuition fees on medical school class composition and financial outlook*”, Kwong and colleagues”, *CMAJ*, 16 April 2002.]

Decreased Access to Professional Services, Especially Rural Areas

High debt loads among professional program graduates might also exacerbate the already limited availability of professional services in many communities, especially rural ones. This may be particularly true for health care services to which access is already very difficult. In fact, another recent national study found that only 10.8% of medical students lived in a rural area at high school graduation. [Reference: “*Characteristics of first-year students in Canadian medical schools*”, Dhalla and colleagues, *CMAJ*, 16 July 2002.] This is important to note because research shows that students from rural areas are more likely to return to those communities to practise medicine. Efforts to increase this percentage may be hindered by rapidly increasing tuition fees.

Education for the Affluent and a Less Diverse Workforce

NPACT also believes that high tuition fees, as well as fear of accumulating a large debt load, create socio-economic barriers to application to professional programs. They may also deter people who traditionally have lower incomes, such as disabled persons and single mothers, from pursuing an education that would lead to a professional career.

The Dhalla et al study noted previously found that almost half — 43.5% — of medical students come from neighborhoods with median incomes in the top quintile. Other findings are:

- Students from the poorest neighborhoods are 7 times less likely to enter medical school than students from the richest neighborhoods.
- Medical students tend to come from higher income neighborhoods and their parents tend to have occupations that have higher social standing compared with working adult Canadians.
- Fifteen percent (15.6%) of the medical students surveyed have a physician parent.

The good news is that the study found a significant increase in female representation in medical school compared to 35 years ago, as well as more visible minorities in medical school than in the Canadian population. Unfortunately, however, certain minority groups such as aboriginals and blacks remain under-represented.

Exacerbation of the “Brain Drain” to the U.S. and Elsewhere

Offers from American recruiters to pay off high debt loads will increasingly attract new professional graduates to the U.S. and elsewhere. The Kwong study also found that first year Ontario medical students reported higher levels of anticipated debt at graduation than graduating students (i.e., those who began their studies prior to deregulation and the introduction of high tuition fees). Also, the proportion of students expecting to graduate with debt of at least \$100 000 more than doubled.

POST SECONDARY EDUCATION AND CANADA'S "INNOVATION STRATEGY"

The federal government has already identified an important role for itself in post secondary education through the following goals outlined as part of Canada's *Innovation Strategy*:

“[That] all qualified Canadians have access to high quality post secondary education.” and “Ensuring that in years to come Canada has enough highly qualified people with the skills for a vibrant, knowledge-based economy.”

In order to meet these goals, and in light of the important issues outlined in this paper, NPACT urges the federal government to:

- 1. Ensure regulated and reasonable tuition fees.**
- 2. Increase federal government funding of postsecondary institutions to alleviate some of the pressures driving tuition fee increases.**
- 3. Provide financial support systems for students that are:**
 - non-coercive, (i.e., not tied to return of service)**
 - developed concomitantly or in advance of any tuition increase,**
 - in direct proportion to the tuition fee increase, and**
 - provided at levels that meet the needs of students.**

Thank you.