

## **Maritime Students Launch Joint “More Than Tuition” Affordability Campaign**

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Today, student leaders from the New Brunswick Student Alliance (NBSA), the UPEI Students' Union (UPEISU), and Students Nova Scotia are launching a joint “More Than Tuition” student affordability campaign. Expanding upon an initiative introduced by Saint Thomas University Students' Union (STUSU) earlier this year, the campaign seeks to dismiss the assumption that tuition is the only significant cost associated with postsecondary education, shining a spotlight on the multitude of rising costs facing students across the Maritimes.

“The primary goal of the More than Tuition campaign is to provide a more comprehensive picture of the range of costs students experience and raise awareness about the real price tag of education,” says Julia Evans, STUSU VP Education. “The feedback we received throughout the initial phase of the campaign confirmed that though tuition is a significant and growing expense, it is only one of the many costs facing students across the region today.”

Indeed, the costs of housing, travel, groceries, textbooks and many other expenses - coupled with historic inflation levels - have made education increasingly inaccessible, with significant implications for postsecondary participation. Until recently, home province participation was in a consistent decline for over 15 years across all three Maritime provinces. While rates have stabilized somewhat since the onset of the pandemic, financial barriers remain one of largest deterrents to educational access, necessitating both consideration and targeted upfront investment.

In addition to information shared via social media over the course of week, students will have the opportunity to contribute to a physical “Walls of Costs” on each campus, breaking down the various expenses they face and how rising costs have impacted their financial, academic and mental wellbeing. The campaign will also contrast these expenses with the available financial aid at provincial and campus levels, emphasizing the need to modernize Student Assistance programs to accurately reflect the costs of being a student in 2022.

“The gap between student costs and provincial Student Assistance funding continues to widen with each passing year, furthering the inaccessibility of education,” says Kyle Cook, StudentsNS Chair. “We know that the pandemic further exacerbated these challenges for many, with  $\frac{2}{3}$  of Canadian students reporting that COVID-19 made education less affordable. Even prior to the pandemic, approximately 1 in 5 student loan borrowers in Nova Scotia faced unmet need.”

Widespread affordability pressures - and concurrent increases in unmet need - are also being observed by student leaders across New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

“Even for students with access to the upfront resources to fund their education, there remain significant impacts on wellbeing and quality of life throughout their time in study,” says Iyobosa Igbineweka, VP Academic and External for the UPEI Students' Union. “Historic vacancy rates across the Maritimes mean that even when students find housing, it is often outside of their price range; we have also seen consistent increases in food bank usage. Others have reported working more hours and taking on additional employment to cover their expenses.”

The feedback received over the course of the campaign will further inform advocacy on student affordability as student leaders engage with government, administration, and other postsecondary stakeholders through provincial Advocacy Weeks later in the month of November.

“As the discrepancy between student costs and available funding becomes more and more pronounced it is harder and harder for students to access, let alone justify, the investment in post-secondary education,” says Alex Nguyen, Vice-Chair of the NBSA. “To ensure that postsecondary education continues to be accessible to all those seeking it, now is the time for sustainable, long-term investments in needs-based funding at both institutional and provincial levels.”

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**For more information, contact:**

Lydia Houck, Executive Director | Students Nova Scotia  
Email: [director@studentsns.ca](mailto:director@studentsns.ca) Phone: 902-476-2367

Sydonia Chandon, Executive Director | New Brunswick Student Alliance  
Email: [director@nbsa-aenb.ca](mailto:director@nbsa-aenb.ca) Phone: (506)-259-5700

Iyobosa Igbineweka, VP Academic & External | UPEI Students' Union  
Email: [vpax@upeisu.ca](mailto:vpax@upeisu.ca) | Phone: (902)-566-0648

*StudentsNS is Nova Scotia's largest student advocacy organization, representing over 20,000 postsecondary students. Our key values are accessibility, affordability, quality & role of the student voice.*

*The New Brunswick Student Alliance (NBSA) is the largest student organization in New Brunswick, representing over 6,000 post-secondary students. We advocate for a post-secondary system where any qualified student can attain a high-quality education while enjoying an exceptional quality of life.*

*The UPEI Students' Union represents the interests of over 5,000 students at the province's only university. We are dedicated to improving the lives of students on campus and enriching the UPEI experience.*

