



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES - MANITOBA

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Cutting Access Program Funding bad for Manitoba

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Getting ahead is becoming virtually impossible for people in severe financial need who want to go back to school and turn their life around. Last year the Manitoba government terminated 210 Provincial Access Bursaries valued at \$1.5 million dollars. Access students who need financial support the most to finish up their degrees are now not receiving it. In addition, the Access program was cut by an additional \$1 million.

Access programs were designed to make Manitoba's post-secondary education accessible to individuals who wouldn't otherwise have had an opportunity to attend. Access programs focus on providing opportunities for Indigenous students with multiple barriers to good education and recognize geographic, financial, social and academic barriers for other students. In addition, Access programming provides personal and academic supports. As a result, students can complete their course of study with dignity and confidence. There are Access Programs at the University of Manitoba, University of Winnipeg, Red River Community College and University College of the North.

As a current student of the Inner City Social Work Program and an Access program participant, I have first-hand experience with how this program helps a person move into the social services field and stay off of oppressive and degrading Employment and Income Assistance. Since 1985, 716 inner-

city social work students have graduated due to this unique and beneficial funding. These graduates now work as social workers helping others in many parts of our community and for the Manitoba government. Undoubtedly, future generations could also benefit from the Access program to move from dependency to giving back and becoming tax payers. Access programming and funding is extremely important to me, helping me succeed in university without accumulating huge debt loads as a single parent of three. As a university student, I am setting a great example for my children. I appreciate The Inner City Social Work Program, where classes start at 9:30am, giving me extra time needed to help prepare my son for school and programming. He needs extra supports due to the residual effects of his traumatic hypoxic brain injury. Graduates are sought after by inner city organizations and many hired right away. My plans are to take advantage of this opportunity, hit the ground running, and secure employment in the social services field.

Inner city social workers are well equipped with many different types of social work training and theoretical perspectives. Our clients will benefit from students with lived experiences of complex poverty who can relate to the multiple barriers clients are facing.

The provincial government's new

there is an alternative.

CCPA-MB
205-765 Main St.
Winnipeg, MB
R2W 3N5

phone

(204) 927-3200

email

ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca

website

[www.policyalternatives.ca/
manitoba](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/manitoba)

blog

www.policyfix.ca

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@ccpamb

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“streamlined” student aid financial package promised equity and access for students. On the contrary, it has added barriers for me and my family to try and overcome. The government is telling us to apply to the Manitoba Scholarship and Bursary Initiative, but this does not work for student like me. It does not provide adequate financial support as the Access program did. And many are scared off by the high cost of university with tuition costs rising by 6.6 percent per year. Research published by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives finds that low income students are deterred from entering university when loans are the only option for funding. Grants and bursaries are the best way to eliminate financial barriers and enable social mobility through post-secondary education.

But instead this program was cut with no notice. At a time when I need it the most my funding was cut by \$2,000. This means I will have to decide whether to budget money to utilities and have no groceries for the next few months or have my utilities cut off, so I can use the money to feed my family. The problem is I need the additional funding now to survive this school year.

Another problem is that student aid is now requiring me to jump through hoops and prove to them I am not living with my ex-husband by faxing our final agreement, which I had sent previously. I refaxed the document over three weeks ago. Funds are due to be dispersed on April 24, 2019 but to date I have not received them. So much for making things easier on students. How does the Manitoba government expect me to purchase books and a bus pass in time for my first class May 3rd if our funding is late?

In response to the changes made by the provincial government, students from the Inner City Social Work Program formed an Advocacy for Education Committee (AEC), holding the province of Manitoba accountable to enable enrolled students to complete their education without additional financial barriers and advocating for a fully funded Access Program for future students in need.

To follow legal precedence set in 1995, Access students will take the Province of Manitoba to court for Breach of Contract for cutting off bursary funding mid program.

The Access program funding should be reinstated and expanded so that more students in need can get help to turn our lives around, get a quality education, enter the labour force and improve our lives, the lives of our families, our communities and give back to Manitoba.

Christine Rossman is a third year social work student in the Inner City Social Work program at the University of Manitoba and a Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives - Manitoba Research Affiliate.

CCPA-MB
205-765 Main St.
Winnipeg, MB
R2W 3N5

phone
(204) 927-3200

email
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twitter
@ccpamb

References available upon request.