

Website Statement on Impact of Alberta separation on PSE - September 21, 2026

What if Alberta separates?

Separation could put Alberta's universities and colleges at a profound competitive disadvantage.

Alberta's post-secondary institutions (PSIs) do not operate in isolation. Our universities and colleges are part of a national system that connects students to financial aid, researchers to federal funding, graduates to careers across Canada, and Alberta to global talent. Separation would disrupt those connections, and the consequences could reach far beyond government funding.

Research excellence could be at risk.

Alberta's universities compete nationally and internationally for research talent, partnerships and investment. Today, hundreds of millions of dollars in federal research funding flow into Alberta through the Tri-Council agencies and other federal programs. That funding cannot simply be switched off and replaced without consequences. Medical research at the University of Alberta and University of Calgary, for example, depends heavily on federal investment. If comparable funding is unavailable, researchers will follow the funding and Alberta risks losing some of its brightest minds, research capacity and international standing.

Students could face higher costs and fewer choices.

What happens to federal student grants and loans? Would Alberta replace them dollar-for-dollar? Alberta students who study elsewhere in Canada could also face a dramatic change. Approximately 10,000 Alberta students attend post-secondary institutions elsewhere in Canada each year. In a separate Alberta, they could potentially be treated as international students, typically having to pay three times as much tuition and being subject to international

enrolment limits. This could mean fewer affordable educational choices for Alberta students.

Alberta could become less attractive to global talent.

International students, researchers, faculty and highly skilled professionals can choose where they live, study and work. Today, an international student who comes to Alberta can pursue education within Canada and potentially build a pathway to Canadian permanent residency and citizenship. Separation would fundamentally change that proposition. The same applies to researchers, physicians and other highly mobile professionals. New borders, immigration rules and credential-recognition requirements could make Alberta less competitive for the people and expertise our economy needs.

Alberta graduates need a credential that travels – but they may be out of luck.

A post-secondary credential is valuable partly because it opens doors. Would an Alberta degree or diploma still be recognized across Canada? Would graduates be able to pursue professional licenses, employment, or further education without new barriers? Uncertainty could affect student choices, and impede Alberta institutions' ability to attract students.

Institutional autonomy matters.

Greater reliance on provincial funding could increase government influence over institutional priorities, programs and academic decisions. Pressure to reduce programs in areas such as arts, humanities and social sciences could narrow the educational environment and accelerate the departure of faculty and students. Universities, colleges and polytechnics need stable funding, but they also need the autonomy to pursue knowledge, educate broadly, challenge conventional thinking and serve society. This may no longer be a given in a separate Alberta.

This is about Alberta's future.

A strong post-secondary system is essential to Alberta's economic, social and cultural future. It attracts talent, drives innovation, supports businesses, educates the workforce and creates opportunities for Albertans.

The question is therefore much bigger than whether Alberta could replace federal dollars.

Could Alberta maintain the talent, research excellence, student access, institutional autonomy, national connectivity and global competitiveness that have made its post-secondary institutions successful and respected, not just across Canada but the world?

Separation would potentially affect where Albertans can study, where researchers can build their careers, where businesses invest, and whether Alberta remains a destination for the world's best minds.

Before disrupting the national systems on which Alberta's post-secondary sector depends, Albertans deserve clear answers not only about what would replace them but also what would be lost if they were not replaced.