

ISSUE BRIEF: STUDENTS LIVING WITH DISABILITIES

BACKGROUND

The Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services estimates that one in seven people in Ontario have a disability.¹ A disability can affect a person's ability to achieve post-secondary education, and can also greatly influence their experience within a post-secondary institution. Due to overall rise in enrollment we believe that living with disabilities are an emerging issue in the post-secondary sector. Why is this population growing? In Ontario, 34 percent of people between the ages of 15 and 64 with disabilities have a college or university degree.² Past governments have reflected this concern within two ground-breaking bodies of legislation: the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (ODA; 2001), and within the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA; 2005). Collectively, these laws mandate that persons living with disabilities in Ontario be sufficiently accommodated.

THE PROBLEM

Students living with disabilities are less likely to access and persist through post-secondary studies than other students. In sum, it is estimated that nearly 25 percent of persons with disabilities reported discontinuing their education because of unmet service and facility needs related to their condition according to a recent Stats Can survey.³ Many of the challenges that students with disabilities face can be grouped into a number of categories:

Support Service Funding: Research suggests that there are more students attending Ontario's universities with a disability than is reflected in the current provincial funding framework. More specifically, data from the 2011 Ontario Student Survey indicates that up to twice as many students living with a disability may be attending university than what is recognized in the provincial funding formula, leading to a shortage of resources.⁴

	a disability reported in the MYAA Report Back (2011)	identified as having a disability reported in the OUSA student survey (2011)
Brock	5%	9%
McMaster	5%	7%
Queen's	4%	9%
Waterloo	6%	5%
Western	5%	9%
Wilfrid Laurier	7%	10%
Windsor	4%	11%

Interviews conducted in 2012 with disability service providers indicate that it is common for a single advisor to be assigned hundreds of cases. This leads to a shortfall in the personnel and resources necessary to adequately address the needs of all students who may benefit from support.

Access to Resources: OUSA's student survey data strongly indicates that as many as half of all students who self-identify as having a disability never access the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD). Sometimes, students with invisible disabilities who view post-secondary education as a fresh start do not register with OSD in an attempt to avoid social stigma associated with having a disability. Moreover, because the onus is on the individual student to actively look for and find information about Summer Transition Programing (STP) and other services, many of these resources are underutilized.

Financial Barriers: There is a great deal of evidence that the public financial assistance system is not meeting the needs of students living with disabilities. For instance, nearly one in five students with disabilities is forced to take out private loans, with a recent survey estimate putting the figure at over \$9000 on average.⁵ Students with disabilities often experience higher than average costs to attend university than their counterparts, due to costs associated with items such as walking, visual and auditory aids, medications, assistive and adaptive technologies, off-campus mental health counselling, off-campus healthcare, and accessing alternative formats for various course-related materials. In fact, sixty-three percent of students who did not use necessary aids did not do so due to the personal cost

% of students with	% of students who
--------------------	-------------------

¹ Ministry of Community and Social Services (2008). *Making Ontario accessible*. Queen's Printer for Ontario. Retrieved from, <http://www.mcscs.gov.on.ca/en/mcscs/programs/accessibility/>

² Statistics Canada. (2006). *Participation and activity limitation survey* (PALS). Catalogue no. 89-628-X

³ Ibid.

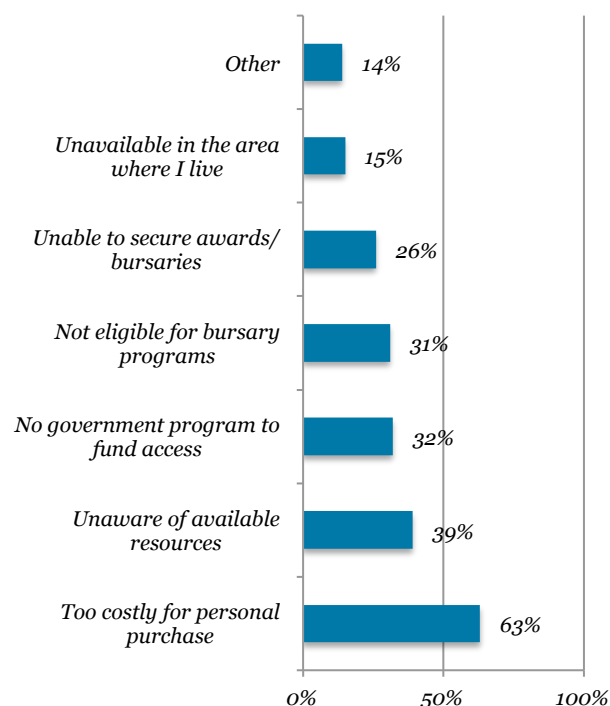
⁴ Data from OUSA's 2011 Student Survey and institutional Multi-Year Accountability Agreement report-backs

⁵ Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation. (2009). *The price of knowledge: Access and student finance in Canada*. Retrieved from, <http://qspace.library.queensu.ca/handle/1974/5783>; Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. (2012). 2011 Student Satisfaction and Usage Survey.

of purchasing these resources, as demonstrated in the figure below.⁶

Students with temporary disabilities also face a particularly difficult time accessing additional bursaries and funding. While the Ontario government offers a \$2,000 bursary to students with permanent and temporary disabilities, the federal government accommodates only the former. For instance, the Canada Bursary for Services and Equipment for Students with Disabilities provides students with a grant of up to \$8,000. However, this federal program is only open to those with permanent disabilities.⁷

REASONS STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES DID NOT ACCESS AIDS OR SERVICES



THE SOLUTION

To ensure that students living with a disability have equitable access to a university education, post-secondary institutions, as well as the federal and provincial governments, must take action to address the barriers that students with disabilities face.

The **federal government** should:

- Expand funding for diagnostic assessments under the Canada Student Grant for Persons with Disabilities to cover the costs of psychosocial assessments in their entirety;
- Expand the eligibility criteria for federal grants and bursaries to include students with temporary disabilities;

The **provincial government** should

- Increase the amount of funding provided to OSDs to better reflect their time and resource demands and to increase the outreach efforts necessary to connect all students with recognized or self-identified disabilities;
- In light of the increased difficulty students with disabilities face finding summer employment, automatically exempt students with severe permanent disabilities from the OSAP expectation of a minimum pre-study period contribution;
- Make further progress towards enacting the Built Environment AODA Standard to improve accessibility on campus;
- Provide information on disability accommodation requirements to students during high school to ensure that they have enough time to have assessments completed;

Individual **universities** should

- Extend full scholarship eligibility to students with disabilities who are taking a reduced course load;
- Promote accessibility on campus by continuing to work towards implementing accessibility standards outlined in the Building Code of the ODA and any other applicable AODA standards;
- Adopt a universal instructional design philosophy where accessibility is built into instructional standards and campus infrastructure outside of traditional spaces for students with disabilities;
- Strive for greater program consistency and a wider target audience in summer transition programs (STPs) for students with disabilities by sending information on Disability Services and summer transition programs (STPs) to all students in the acceptance packages;
- Pursue comprehensive training strategies for faculty and staff to help reduce or eliminate stigma as a barrier for students accessing services.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. (2010). *Bursary for students with disabilities*. Queen's Printer for Ontario. Retrieved from, <https://osap.gov.on.ca/OSAPPortal/en/A-ZListofAid/PRD9197088.html>