

NEWS RELEASE: DOUGLAS STUDENTS APPLAUD ACCESSBC BUDGET WIN!

Every year the BC Government releases their annual budget that contains the financial priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. Throughout the year, student associations from across BC advocate for funding changes that will support student success. This year the Douglas Students' Union (DSU) alongside the members of the BC Federation of Students (BCFS) urged the provincial government to fix the current funding model to increase funding for post-secondary institutions so that access to education can be improved for students. This has been an urgent, long-time campaign *Fund it Fix it* with the BCFS. On this year's budget day, the BC government announced that the 2023 Budget includes provisions to increase student financial assistance and a \$480 million-Dollar three-year investment for the Future Skills Plan.

We are eager to see how British Columbia's investment in the Future Skills Plan will impact students' education and career prospects. While this investment is unquestionably a positive step forward, it is concerning that it may not be sufficient to meet the needs of the BC's Post-Secondary Institution's funding needs. The Minister of Finance, Katrine Conroy, did forecast over a million-job opening over the next decade which will require post-secondary education. The budget includes only a 5% increase in operating grants for post-secondary institutions, which is insufficient to keep up with the economy's inflation. While the DSU applauds the government's commitment to funding mental health services and affordable housing, it is concerned that the budget falls short of meeting students' academic needs and the 5% increase in operating grants looks like a reduction in our economy today.

Furthermore, the Douglas Students' Union has been advocating for free contraception for all, in coalition with the AccessBC campaign, over the last couple years. We are happy to share that the BC government committed to fund and support free contraception for all in the 2023 budget! Free contraception will help British Columbians in a significant way and this announcement is a victory for reproductive justice in BC. Regardless of age or income, everyone in BC will have free access to prescription birth control starting April 1st, 2023. In terms of ensuring that everyone has access to necessary healthcare, particularly in terms of reproductive health, this program represents a tremendous advancement as BC is the first province to

announce that \$119 million will be set aside over three years to cover prescription contraceptive options including oral pills, injections, copper, and hormonal intrauterine devices (IUDs), implants and Plan B. “This is a huge win; I believe that people who need contraception are finally being heard, and I feel a sense of hope for better equal rights”, said Myat Noe Pwint, DSU Women’s Representative. We are pleased to have contributed to this accomplishment and to have collaborated with other organizations to see that it was carried out.

The success of the Access BC Campaign should be an example for other provinces and territories to prioritise access to basic healthcare services, regardless of financial circumstances. Undoubtedly, this policy change will improve the lives of many people, and we hope that it will encourage other jurisdictions to follow suit. Together, we can keep bringing about positive change and enhancing everyone's access to vital healthcare services. The DSU will continue to advocate for the interests of students across British Columbia and work towards making education accessible for all.