



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
**STUDENTS' UNION**



# Budget Committee Submission

City of Toronto's 2023 Budget Consultations

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## **SUBMITTED BY**

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## **About Us**

The University of Toronto Students' Union (UTSU) is a not-for-profit organization incorporated under the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act (CNCA). The UTSU functions autonomously from the University of Toronto, and acts as the primary student government for over 39, 000 undergraduate students at the University of Toronto's St. George campus.



The University of Toronto Student Union (UTSU) thanks the City of Toronto Budgetary Committee for allowing us to once again provide our thoughts and comments on the proposed 2023 budget. Our organization recognizes that the council must make cuts to account for the \$ 1.5 billion CAD budgetary shortfall. Our priority is to ensure that the Budgetary Committee will not commit to cuts that affect essential social services and programs.

Much like the previous budget, student concerns have been largely absent from the 2023 Municipal Budget Submissions. Toronto has one of the highest populations of post- secondary students in Canada. On average, post-secondary education generates \$4 billion CAD dollars annually in municipal revenue. Therefore, it is the council's responsibility to ensure students' voices are heard and their concerns are reflected in this budget. The UTSU also notes the need to maintain essential services for students. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a significant impact on the city's youth. As the [2022 report from the Medical Officer of Health](#) stated "*Global studies report rates of anxiety, depression, stress, and loneliness have more than doubled from pre-pandemic levels, with anticipated long term consequences.*" The effects of the pandemic will persist long after lockdowns and other preventative measures have been lifted.

The UTSU urges the committee to maintain funding for initiatives that will support the physical, emotional and financial well-being of students. We also further encourage the council to ensure students are exempted from service increases, such as the planned 10- cent fare increase. We call upon the Committee to ensure that all diverse perspectives are included in the consultations.

**The University of Toronto Students' Union offers the following recommendations for the City of Toronto's 2023 Budget Committee:**

## 1. HOUSING

From November 2021 to 2022, [rents increased 27%](#) across the city of Toronto. According to a widely cited report from rentals.ca, the average rent for a one-bedroom [Toronto apartment is \\$2,100 CAD](#). This report forecasts a rapid rise in rental prices in the coming fiscal year. The current Average Market Rent (AMR) figure provided by the [City of Toronto is \\$1,446 CAD](#). Given the significant gap, we are asking for mid-quarter reevaluation of the AMR. The UTSU is committed to helping students find safe and equitable housing. In their [2017 review](#), the Auditor General noted significant barriers were preventing not-for-profit organizations from providing affordable housing. They identified several solutions, including establishing programs for local governments to provide start-up capital. The UTSU strongly commends the city of Toronto for its commitment to develop a post-secondary student housing strategy. However, we note the need for student advocacy organizations to be present at these discussions. As such, we ask the council to commit to the following.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Reassess the AMR figure so it is consistent with the rate of inflation.*

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Ensure student unions and advocacy groups are included in any discussions relating to the Post-Secondary Student Housing Strategy. The UTSU would be eager to facilitate these discussions.*

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Provide more capital to the Toronto Community Housing Corporation to expand their affordable housing projects and Co-Op programs.*

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Invest in housing relief funds and shelters for youths suffering from homelessness.*

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Increase financial support for municipal programs that offer grants such as the Toronto Rent Bank. Similarly, provide the necessary funds to forgive any loans granted by the organization prior April 1, 2020.*

## 2. AFFORDABILITY

The cost-of-living crisis continues to be an ongoing problem for Toronto residents. Students at the University of Toronto are no exception. [Roughly 1/3 of the residents](#) of Covenant House Toronto, are post- secondary or college students. The UTSU's on-campus food bank [saw a 100% increase in usage](#) over the past year. International students and newcomers face additional To this effect, the UTSU is particularly concerned by the \$4 million CAD decrease in funding for Toronto Employment and Social Services. The Employment & Social Services provide vital support to youth & post- secondary students within this city. The UTSU acknowledges historic increases in funding for social services were approved during the pandemic. However, if the problem remains so should the funding.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Maintain* the current funding levels for Toronto Employment and Social Services.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Invest* in employment opportunities' training and housing support services specifically geared towards newcomers and marginalized communities

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Support* on-campus & student led food banks. Develop specific funding and equipment grants to help alleviate on- campus food insecurity.

## 3. TRANSIT

As housing becomes increasingly unaffordable, students have been pushed further from the downtown core. According to [StudentsMoveTO](#), a third of post- secondary students in the GTA spend two hours or more commuting to classes. The same study also found that students who commute for more than an hour suffer from negative academic and mental health outcomes. The planned cuts to service and fare increases will have a detrimental impact on the welfare of University of Toronto students. If the city is committed to accessible, equitable transit, the following must be undertaken:

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Exclude* youth fares from the planned 10 cent fare increase.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Freeze the price of the "Post- Secondary Monthly Pass."* *Extend* eligibility to include certificate and non- degree based post- secondary

programs.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Extend* the eligibility of the “Fair Pass” qualifications to post-secondary students who qualify based on financial need.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Invest* in creating a single-fare student and seniors discount.

## 4. ENVIRONMENT

In 2021, [the Toronto Atmospheric Project](#) reported the city saw a significant increase in metropolitan GHG levels. We commend the city for committing to a 30% decrease in emissions by 2030 in the [TransformTOProject](#). However, Toronto has only had [limited decreases](#) in emissions over the past decade. Today, Toronto's [annual emissions](#) are 20 times those of the next largest Canadian city by population. Toronto residents have been forced to adjust to increasingly chaotic weather patterns in Southern Ontario. The UTSU calls upon the Committee to commit to greater funding towards environment initiatives.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Increase* investments into Environment and Climate services. *Invest* in emission friendly transportation incentives, such as carpool lanes.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Provide* financial support for electric heat pump installation to replace natural gas water and space heating systems. The UTSU notes inefficient heating systems continue to be the largest single contributor ([54%](#)) to emissions in the city.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Establish* a city managed, full refundable property tax credit for the installation and usage of solar panels.

## 5. POLICING

The 2023 Budget proposes a TPS budget increase of \$50 million CAD. The UTSU is concerned that such an increase will have detrimental effects on at-risk youth & students. On campus, the Toronto Police Service (TPS) has failed to address equity concerns or create safety in our communities. TPS has been continually critiqued for anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism and violence. Based on the [2020 Ontario Human Rights Commission Report](#), Black people were 20 times more likely than

their white counterparts to be fatally shot by police. Recently, the City of Toronto was named in a lawsuit filed by a former University of Toronto student who was tasered, and arrested by police without cause. The TPS have stated this is simply a case of [“mistaken identity.”](#) When responding to mental health crises on campus, Toronto Police have handcuffed and subjected post- secondary students to wrongful arrest. Police are not community support workers and lack the training to appropriately respond to mental health crises. The City of Toronto must provide funding for equity based mental health and addiction resources for youth.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Reduce* the policing budget and reallocate the proposed additional funds to the above-listed social programs and services.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Ensure* money allocated through the proposed increase is spent on high quality mental health and racial bias training for the Toronto Police Service.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Commit* to an overall reduction in annual police spending in the 2024 Budget.

## 6. MENTAL HEALTH

The UTSU recognizes that the visible face of mental health and addiction issues in this city are the recent high- profile and violent attacks that have occurred on public transport. However, students are suffering from a mental health crisis of their own. An internal survey at the [Dallai Lana School of Public Health \(DLSPH\)](#) found that over 71% of students reported their mental health had been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 50% said they had experienced clinically significant symptoms of anxiety. Over 10% experienced suicidal ideation. Post- Secondary institutions are struggling to provide adequate mental health support for their students. The UTSU calls upon the Committee to commit to the following.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Support* mental health promotion strategies and address stigma through increased funding for the Toronto Public Health Agency.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Increase* funding for community groups and non-profit organizations on- campus that support individuals in addressing mental health challenges

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Increase* funding for mental health support, helplines and crisis centres for sexual violence survivors on campus.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *Provide* additional funding or grants for organizations which offer mental health services for indigenous, BIPOC or newcomer youth and post-secondary students.



## **Conclusion**

The UTSU welcomes the opportunity to provide perspective on any other student-centered initiatives that the council may wish to inquire into. We thank the members for taking the time to read our submissions.

Thank you for your time and consideration.