

March 1, 2024

Government of Alberta Budget 2024 Impact on the University of Lethbridge

On February 29, 2024 the Province of Alberta tabled the 2024-2025 Alberta budget in Alberta's Legislative Assembly.

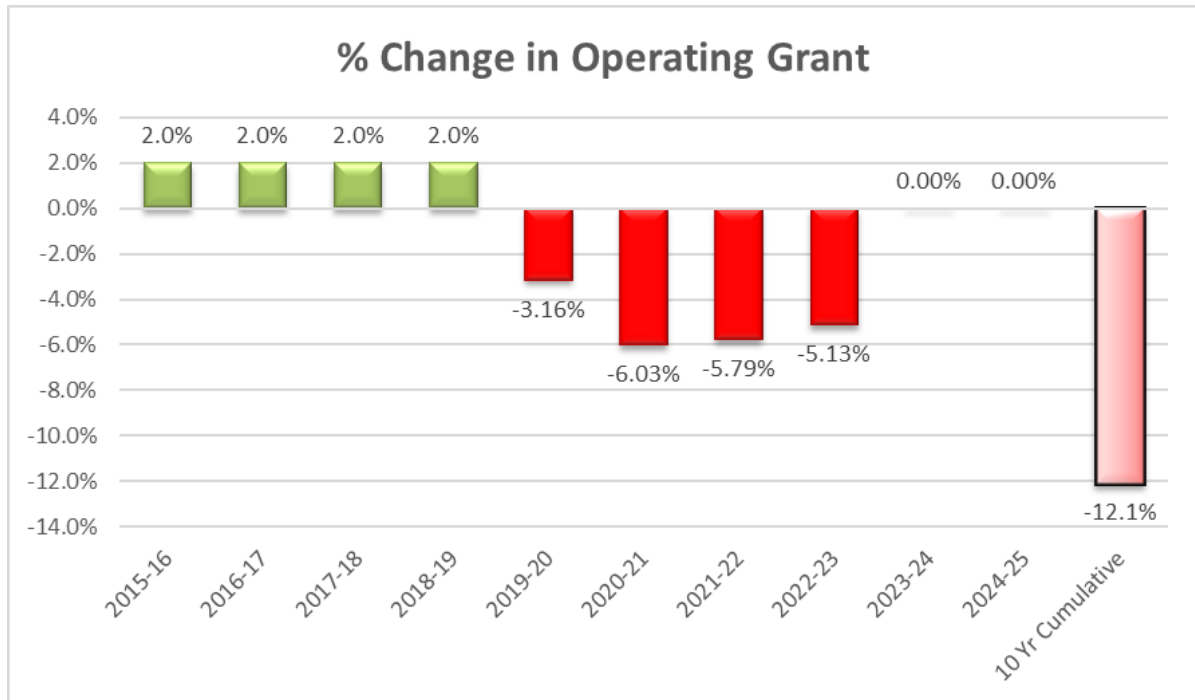
The operating support for the University of Lethbridge has remained static. This budget does not consider inflationary, and cost of living increases experienced over the past number of years. The following is a summary of the operating grants from the province:

Grant	Description	2023-24	2024-25	Difference	% Change
Operating	Operating base funding	\$87,934,020	\$87,934,020	\$0	0.0%
Mental Health	Supports the expansion and enhancement of mental health services and awareness	\$635,000	\$635,000	\$0	0.0%
Targeted Enrolment Expansion	Supports strategic investment in targeted programs that focus on addressing workforce needs in high-demand economic sectors as outlined in the Alberta at Work Initiative	\$1,423,642	\$1,529,007	\$105,365	7.4%
Students with Disabilities	Enhance capacity to provide timely services, supports, and accommodations for students with disabilities	\$275,705	\$275,705	\$0	0.0%
Health Workforce Action	Increase access to health credit programs in order to address the labour market priorities	\$284,000	\$284,000	\$0	0.0%
Capital Maintenance Renewal	Assists with maintaining the condition of facilities and to cover the cost of repairs, upgrades, maintenance to and replacement of building systems and major components.	\$5,539,949	\$4,240,071	(\$1,299,878)	-23.5%

Targeted enrolment expansion funds are competitive, time-limited, funds previously secured through proposals to government. These include seat expansion for programs in Bachelor of Nursing, Master of Science – Management (Business Analytics), Bachelor of Science (Computer Science), Bachelor of Management (Business Administration).

After a one-year increase as part of a stimulus initiative in 2023-24, funding for capital maintenance and renewal has returned to the 2022-23 level of \$4.2 million.

The following chart shows the annual percentage change in the provincial operating grant, as well as the cumulative loss (12.1%) over the past ten years. The 2024-2025 provincial operating grant approximates the operating grant received in 2009-2010 (\$85,639,923).



Medical Program

One very important and exciting budget news item is funding that will support a rural medical training program. While the full budget details are not yet clear, the budget included significant operational and capital investments to establish a rural physician training program located at the University of Lethbridge, in partnership with the University of Calgary. Access to a family physician is an incredible challenge for many families in small to mid-sized centres across southern Alberta – including rural and Indigenous communities. Investing in a program that recruits local students, and trains them locally, will lead to more doctors practicing in rural areas. Today's announcement will greatly improve health outcomes for Albertans and access to family physicians.

This program is possible due to the joint work undertaken with the University of Calgary and is a tremendous example of what is possible when institutions work together. We are excited to continue this work.

The budget included a capital investment of \$26 million (2024-25 \$4; 2025-26 \$5M; 2026-27 \$17M), with additional funding in 2027-28 to bring the total commitment to \$43M. These funds will transform the Community Centre for Wellness (located on our Lethbridge campus) into a teaching facility for medical students, which will add state-of-the-art learning spaces as well as provide opportunities to serve the community. Renovating an existing building for these important activities is also a prudent investment and will accelerate the establishment of a rural physician training program.

The University of Lethbridge is looking forward to engaging with members of the internal and external communities as this important initiative unfolds.



International Student Program

On January 22, 2024, the Government of Canada announced a national cap on applications for international study permits, a requirement for provinces and territories to issue Provincial Attestation Letters (PALs) to international students who are subject to the cap, and a pause on accepting/processing study permit applications until provincial PAL processes were created.

On February 12, 2024, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) provided Alberta with an allocation of 41,000 study permit applications for the period January 22, 2024 to January 21, 2025. The Ministry of Advanced Education is responsible for distributing this allocation across all Designated Learning Institutions (DLIs), both public and private, in Alberta.

The Minister communicated on February 29, 2024 that the University of Lethbridge allocation of study permit applications for January 22, 2024 to January 21, 2025 is 2,687, which is a 49 per cent increase over the number of study permit applications to the University in 2023. It is important to note that this does not represent the number of *approved* study permits that will be issued, but rather the allocation of applications that may be received. Advanced Education has developed a process for issuing PALs, which will begin to be issued starting March 1, 2024.

The allocation cap restriction was a concern for the University as it had the possibility of decreasing our international student enrolment, which would have had significant impacts on our budget. With this clarity on our cap one hurdle has been mitigated, but there is still concern regarding the impact of the IRCC pause on accepting applications and the backlog that will now be created in IRCC processing of study permit applications. These delays make impact the ability and/or desire of international students to study in Canada, and impact 2024-25 international student enrolment.

Senior administration continues to work with government officials and Universities Canada on addressing this issue.

2024-25 Budget Development

Now that the University has the details of the 2024-25 funding from the province, the budget development will progress, with the target to present the consolidated budget to the General Faculties Council (GFC) Strategic Planning Committee and GFC for discussion, and the Board of Governors for final approval in April 2024.