

Lately, there has been considerable commentary about student housing or more accurately, the shortage of accessible, affordable housing in some university communities.

Addressing the current shortage of accessible, affordable student housing is a critical issue. It is very much on the minds of affected students, their families and university leaders.

Having access to safe, secure, and affordable housing is critical to student success, core to the mission of our universities.

Universities are on the forefront of driving population growth in Atlantic Canada. Our region has become a national and international education destination. In addition to a strong cohort of ‘local’ students, there are now more than 36,000 students from across Canada and internationally studying at Atlantic universities. Many of those students will choose to stay in the region following their graduation: they are essential to replacing our rapidly aging citizenry and diversifying our communities. University graduates become the future healthcare professionals, business, industry and community leaders and entrepreneurs, so important to the future of communities across the region.

Recent comments conflating international students and the housing crisis are deeply concerning to university leaders in Atlantic Canada. International students bring important knowledge, diversity and skills to our campuses, communities, and workforce. It is imperative to Atlantic Canada’s future economic prosperity and social, cultural development, that we continue to welcome them.

Housing challenges in our region is a complex and systemic issue that requires collaboration between all levels of government and housing partners.

The Association of Atlantic Universities (AAU) recently met with members of the federal Atlantic Liberal Caucus. The AAU advised those M.P.s that now, more than ever, is the time for the federal government to provide national leadership and support important partners, like universities, to deliver accessible and affordable housing in the region’s university communities.

Our institutions have long provided student housing and every university in Atlantic Canada have plans to expand student housing, both on-and-off campus, to meet growing demand. And consideration is being given to innovative housing models to help relieve market pressures in their local communities.

To help those plans reach fruition, the AAU calls on the federal government to:

1. Expand access to low-cost financing to build accessible, affordable student housing,
2. Broaden eligibility for housing programs through the National Housing Strategy to include universities and,
3. Expand the eligibility criteria in existing federal infrastructure programs, enabling universities to compete for funding opportunities – this is not a request for new money!

Solutions are at hand by taking a collaborative approach. Atlantic universities are committed to working with all levels of government to address the housing needs of students in a responsible and sustainable way.

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The Association of Atlantic Universities (AAU) represents the interests of universities across the region, ensuring public visibility for the key role they play in preparing future leaders of our communities, in path-breaking research and innovation, and in contributing to the economic, cultural, and social prosperity of life in Atlantic Canada.