

For Immediate Release

Due for a demographic dilemma: what a rebound in young adults means for post-secondary education in Northern Ontario

December 15th, 2023 – Over the past decade, many colleges and universities in Northern Ontario have significantly increased international student enrolment to compensate for a decline in domestic enrolment. This decline resulted from a shrinking population of young adults and decreased public funding. Demographic trends are set to shift, however, as the 18 to 21 age group in Northern Ontario is projected to grow by 13 per cent between 2021 and 2034. Accounting for growth across Ontario, Northern Ontario's seven public universities and six public colleges are likely to see more than a 15 per cent increase in domestic applications.

Decisions about how to address the projected influx of domestic post-secondary students in the face of increasing international student enrolment in Northern Ontario need to be made quickly. This demographic dilemma is explored in the latest report by Northern Policy Institute, *Due for a Demographic Dilemma: What a rebound in young adults means for post-secondary education in Northern Ontario*.

Post-secondary institutions in Ontario have no financial incentive to increase total enrolment by more than three per cent annually. Furthermore, even with recently announced changes for international students, colleges and universities have limited financial incentive to choose local students over international students whose tuition fees are typically five times higher.

“Absent public funding reforms, colleges and universities in Northern Ontario will likely have to choose between rejecting greater numbers of local students or taking the big financial risk of giving up some international student revenue,” said author William Dunstan.

The report also finds a third factor at play. Since Northern Ontario schools often have lower admissions requirements, they could face an influx of applications from Southern Ontario youth who cannot get into local schools. Therefore, future high school graduates may see greater competition to land a spot.

There are a few potential policy considerations in light of the findings, the first of which is increasing enrolment-based funding. If this option is not viable, efforts to retain students following graduation is a must. Local colleges and universities can be vehicles for strengthening Northern Ontario's economy and communities, but only to the extent that students live and work in the North after graduating.

Want to learn more, read the report here: <https://www.northernpolicy.ca/due-for-a-demographic-dilemma->

Media Interviews: Author William Dunstan and NPI President & CEO, Charles Cirtwill, are available for comment. To arrange an interview, please contact:

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About the Author:

William Dunstan holds a Bachelor of Public Affairs and Policy Management from Carleton University. During his studies, William learned about the wide world of public policy and developed a particular research interest in economic policy and regional development. Professionally, he has worked in several policy-related roles both in the think tank sphere and with the federal government. Originally from Ottawa, William developed a love for Northeastern (or Central) Ontario and the region's high quality of living during his time as an Experience North intern in 2021.

About Northern Policy Institute:

Northern Policy Institute is Northern Ontario's independent, evidence-driven think tank. We perform research, analyze data, and disseminate ideas. Our mission is to enhance Northern Ontario's capacity to take the lead position on socio-economic policy that impacts our communities, our province, our country, and our world.

We believe in partnership, reconciliation, collaboration, communication, and cooperation. Our team seeks to do inclusive research that involves broad engagement and delivers recommendations for specific, measurable action. Our success depends on our partnerships with other entities present in or passionate about Northern Ontario.

Based in Thunder Bay and Kirkland Lake, NPI is active in every region of Northern Ontario. During the summer months, we have satellite offices in communities across Northern Ontario staffed by teams of Experience North placements. These placements are university and college students working in your community on issues important to you and your neighbours.

A quick note on this report

This report was developed in reaction to a web article written by Alex Usher in October 2022. Usher is an internationally recognized expert in post-secondary planning and funding. His piece looks at colleges and universities across Canada and concludes that this demographic dilemma will be felt across Canada.