



The Canadian Association of Postdoctoral Scholars
L'Association Canadienne des Postdoctorantes et Postdoctorants

February 22, 2024

To the Postdoctoral Researchers of Queen's University, PSAC 901

With permission to share publicly and with your employer

Letter In Solidarity with the Postdoctoral Researchers at Queens University

We are writing to convey our support to the Postdoctoral Researchers at Queens University. We, the Canadian Association of Postdoctoral Scholars/ L'Association Canadienne des Postdoctorantes et Postdoctorants (CAPS/ACPP), are a non-profit, volunteer-run, professional association. We are the sole association in Canada managed by Canadian Postdocs. Our mandate is to improve the lives, professional development, and work experience of the over 10K Canadian postdocs that we represent.

CAPS/ACPP encourages all Unionized Postdocs to learn about their Collective Agreements, to join postdoc associations nationally and locally, to understand and negotiate their work contracts, and to be proactive about their needs.

What is a postdoc? Postdocs are highly qualified and skilled professionals who continue to pursue a research career following a doctoral degree. Postdocs are not students. We typically have 10 years of post-secondary education, and two or more degrees. Postdocs who want to stay in academia will likely be postdocs for at least five years. Postdocs conduct research, teach, advise, mentor, and manage research groups and labs. In many ways, Postdocs are the backbone of Canadian research.

Postdocs are an essential talent pool nationally and locally. We firmly believe that Postdocs deserve good working conditions in recognition of their value and in order to fulfill their job expectations. We advocate at many levels to support improved conditions: Governments, Funding Agencies, Institutions, Postdoc Groups, and individual Postdocs.

Employers should offer fair and reasonable wages. Inadequate pay is the greatest challenge facing Canadian Postdocs. In 2003, the value of a Tri-Agency funded postdoctoral fellowship was \$40K/year. Today, in 2023, this value remains relatively unchanged, and, at just \$45K before taxes, it is insufficient to meet today's cost of living. Since 2003 the cost of goods and services has risen 53%. We are asking that the value of Tri-Agency Funded postdoctoral fellowships also increase by 53% to \$61K; and index to inflation moving forward. We recommend that Canadian Postdoc Employers make similar adjustments to their salaries to provide equitable and liveable wages.

We observe that the Tri-Agency funding amounts from 2003 seem to have set a national standard for postdoc pay. Some Canadian institutions have minimum postdoc salaries just below this value, ~\$35k whereas others start just above at ~\$50k. Despite their education, qualifications, and value to Canadian research, many postdocs do not make enough to afford to rent a one bedroom apartment in the cities where they work. Postdocs, with an average age of 33 years, are not paid enough to start or support a family, nor save for their future. We recommend that Postdoc Employers understand their local cost of living, and provide a minimum salary commensurate with the cost of a one-bedroom apartment.



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Postdoc employers should offer access to free or subsidized support for mental health, childcare, and immigration. Access to basic healthcare is an essential benefit that Postdoc employers should provide to Postdocs and their dependents. Healthcare should include reliable and consistent access to mental health resources. Our 2020 National Postdoc Survey found that 80% of Canadian Postdocs experience severe mental health challenges, highlighting a universal need for mental health support for Postdocs. A specific area of support should include improved stress management resources.

Regarding housing and relocation support: Long-distance and international moves are costly and present substantial barriers to researchers accessing postdoctoral research jobs. Moreover, many postdocs start their first contracts after grad school, and may not have the savings to self-fund a move. Delays in contract start dates or first paychecks can also lead to periods of extreme financial hardship. We support the provision of housing and relocation support for Postdocs in order to provide equitable access to these positions. We agree that Postdoc Employers should work to provide postdocs with access to affordable housing near to their place of work.

Professional Development. Due to the temporary nature of a postdoctoral career stage, professional development is a necessary part of the postdoc experience. We recommend that employers provide postdocs with access to career development resources. Canadian postdocs have employment goals in the following sectors: tenure track faculty, non-tenured academic research, industry and private sector research, public service, and consulting. We recommend that postdoc employers work to understand and meet the professional development needs of their postdocs.

Support diversity and inclusion. An academic career path should be accessible to any qualified candidate regardless of their financial status. At current rates of pay, only postdocs with independent sources of wealth, from partners or family, can afford to do a postdoc. Low postdoc pay and poor access to benefits is a barrier for equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility in science that needs to be addressed at multiple levels by the Federal Government, Funding Agencies, and Postdoc Employers.



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We stand in solidarity with the Postdocs at Queen's University and support their bargaining efforts to improve their working conditions.

Sincerely,

Members of the Executive Council
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Disclaimer: CAPS/ACPP issues the above statement of solidarity in support of negotiations and actions that aim to improve the lives, professional development, and work experience of all postdocs. This statement is not an endorsement of statements, promotional material, opinions, or specific language used therein by the addressee.