



# Return to Campus Report 2022

The pandemic has drastically affected student life and the SAIT experience. Saitsa wanted to give students the opportunity to let us know how they are feeling about a return to campus in March 2022



Governance &  
Advocacy Office

Saitsa\*

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# Introduction

**It's safe to say that COVID-19 has impacted the lives of everyone globally. COVID has impacted every aspect of our lives from the way to interact with each other, to where and how we work. Post-Secondary students are no exception to this.**

Students have had to navigate their education switching between in person and online since March 2020, as well as having to navigate family life, and work life. The newest round of COVID lockdowns is no exception to this. With seven weeks remaining in the winter 2022 semester students are once again faced with heading

back onto campus come March 2022. With doctor's, politicians, and citizens trying to navigate a world where we learn to live with COVID-19 students have a lot of questions, and concerns about how another switch of format will once again impact their education, their health, and the health of those they love.



**In recognition of this, Saitsa wanted to give students the opportunity to let us know how they are feeling about a return to campus in March 2022.**



# Impact of COVID-19 on Students



**It is important to consider the immense impact that COVID-19 have had on post-secondary students so that we can understand how all changes that occurred, and are occurring, due to the pandemic and be better understood.**

Research has shown that student mental health issues have escalated during COVID-19 and that students have consistently had the lowest mental health across the country during this time when compared to all others in all industries (Kwakye & Kibort-Crocker, 2020; Cheng et al, 2021; Morneau Shepell, 2021(a); Morneau Shepell, 2021(b). Riwi, 2021; McMaster University, 2021) Examinations of pre- and post COVID-19 levels of mental health needs and found that there was a 10% rise of students in need for mental health services during the first wave of the pandemic (Riwi, 2021). Alarming, they found that this continued to increase throughout the year once in

April (another 10%), and then again in July and rose steadily until October 2020 when they ended data collection (Riwi, 2021). The Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health conducted a study in May of 2020 and found that 60% of students were worried about the pandemic, 70% reported feeling stressed, anxious, and isolated, and 82% were worried about their futures (2021). According to McMaster University (2021), there are generally three areas in which students' health have been compromised during the COVID-19 pandemic. First, it presents as an ambient stressor, which is all consuming and almost random. It may present itself as you are leaving the house

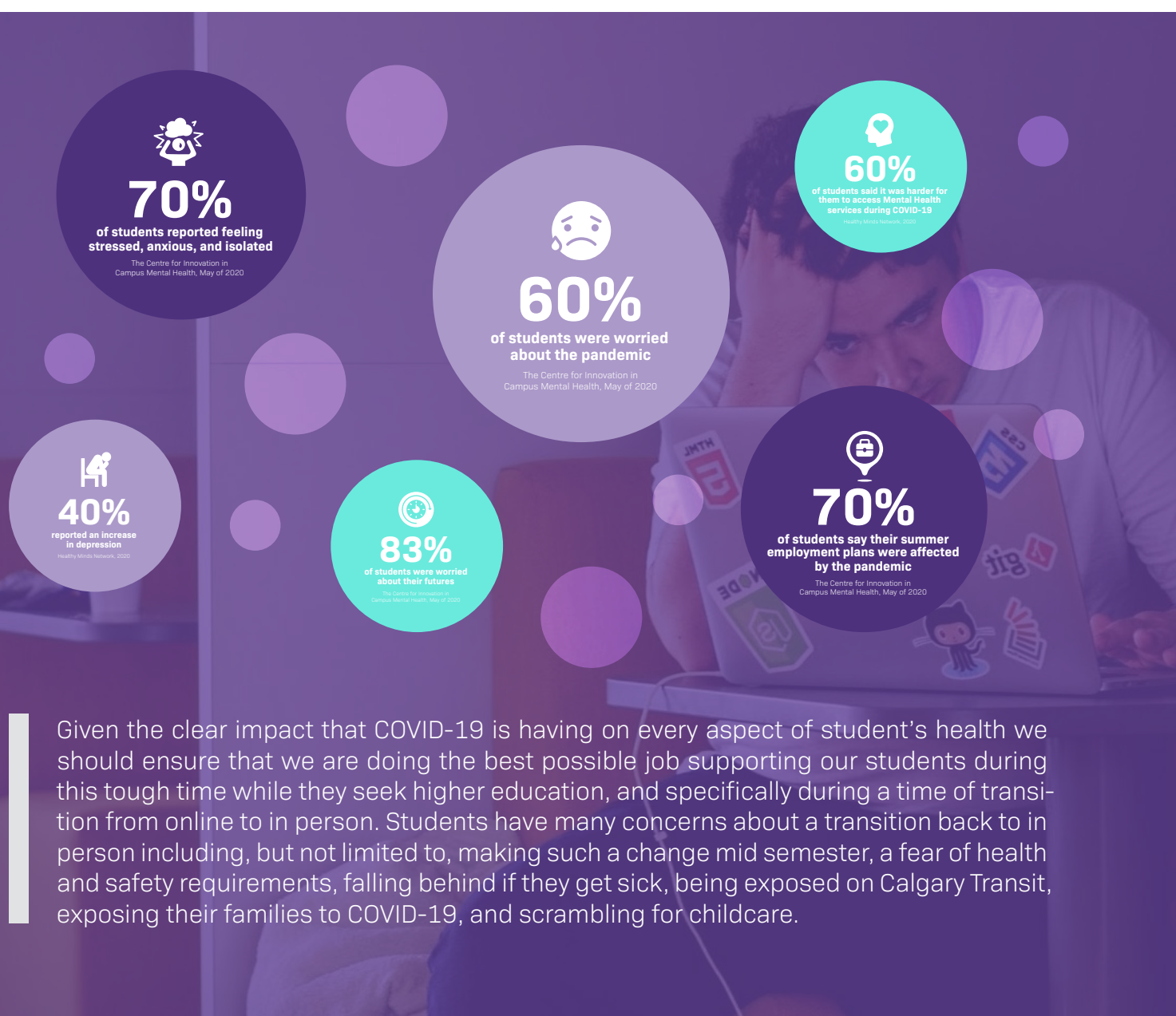
to run an errand, and someone has an anxiety attack as they realize the world is not as it was two years ago. Second, COVID-19 has robbed people of the usual resources they would have to cope in such situations because the world is operating differently. Lastly, the pandemic has exacerbated stressors that were already present in student's life. For example, 70% of students reported that their summer employment plans were affected by the pandemic causing much stress about the new academic year (Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, 2021).



Student Mental Health Resources  
[CLICK HERE](#)

Students continuously struggled with worry, anxiety, depression, and frustration during this time (Morneau Shepell, 2020; Riwi, 2021; Healthy Minds Network, 2020; Rashid et al, 2020; Changwon et al, 2020). In addition to the increase in mental health issues during the COVID-19 pandemic, students are reporting that they are having an even harder time accessing mental health services. Healthy Minds Network (2020) reported that 60% of students they surveyed said it was harder for them to access ser-

vices during COVID-19, than previously. In other words, students are suffering from mental health issues more now than pre COVID but are finding it harder to access services to help them due to the pressure the pandemic has put on the systems. Further, Rashid et al (2020) found that 57% of students reported an increase in anxiety, 81% reported an increase in the feeling of loneliness, and 40% reported an increase in depression compared to the same time the previous year (2019).



# Methods

**All 332 participants that took part in this survey were SAIT students. Our survey consisted of 3 questions including:**

**1**

Do you want to remain online for classes the rest of the semester?

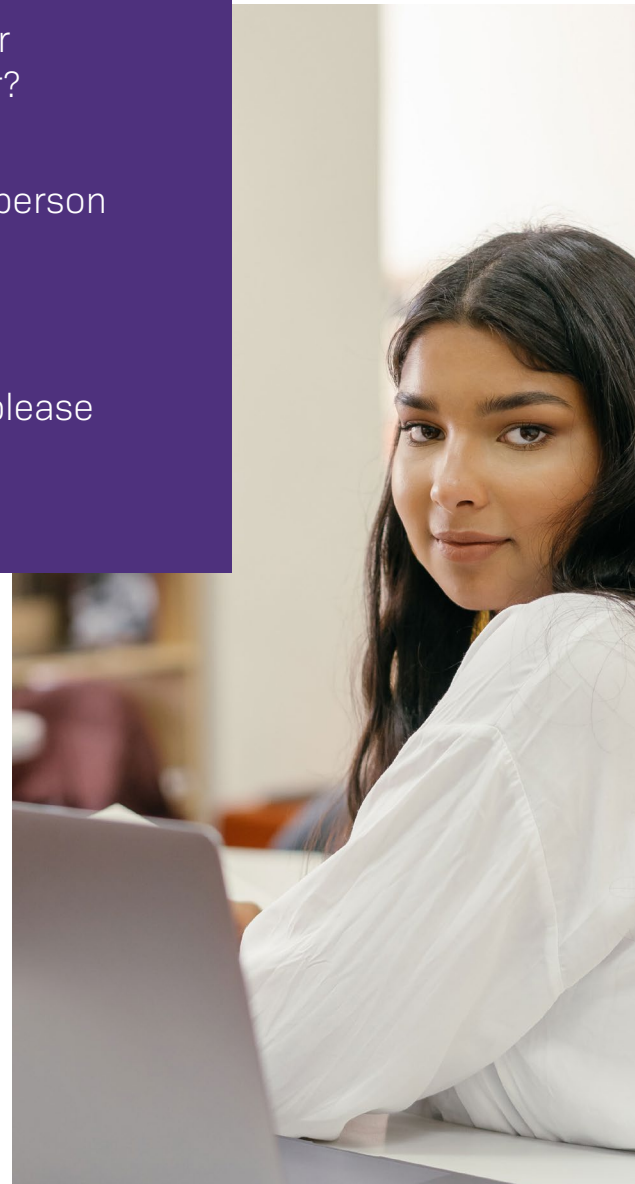
**2**

Do you feel safe returning to in person classes this semester?

**3**

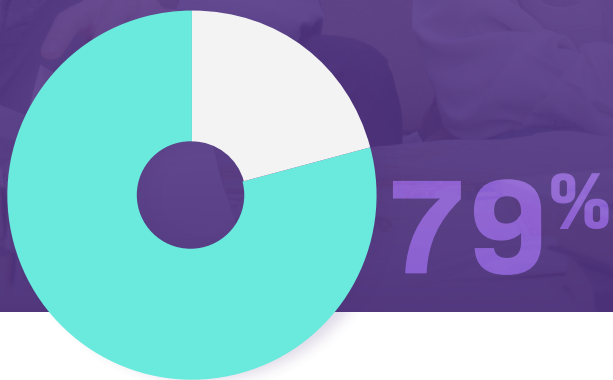
If you said you do not feel safe returning to in person classes, please tell us why below.

The survey was conducted through Survey Monkey and was sent to students via the Saitsa Student Bulletin, social media, and the Saitsa website. Our survey remained open from February 8 until February 15, 2022. If participants expressed that they did not feel safe returning to campus they were given the opportunity to express, why they do not feel safe returning to in person classes.



# Results

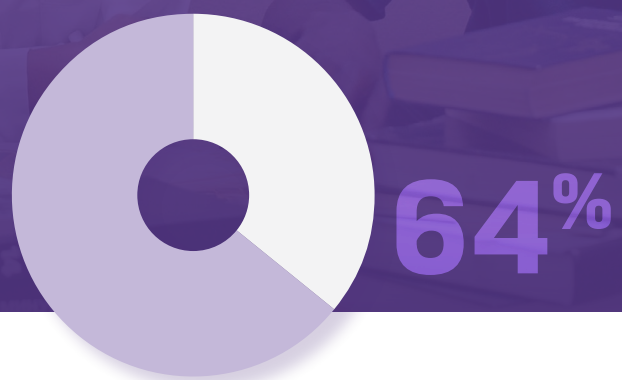
We asked students two yes/no questions. First, we wanted to know if they wanted to remain online for the rest of the semester, and secondly, we wanted to know if they felt safe returning to in-person classes.



**78.92% (262 students) wanted to remain online for the rest of the Winter 2022 semester.**

Students overwhelmingly said that they wanted to remain online for the rest of the Winter 2022 semester. The results were 78.92% of students (262 students).

Our second question returned an interesting result as we asked students if they felt safe returning to



**64.16% (213 students) said that they didn't feel safe returning to campus.**

campus. Only 213 students or 64.16% said that they didn't feel safe coming to classes in-person, while 35.84% (119) said that they felt safe returning to campus.

This suggests that students potentially have more reasons than only COVID as to why they want to stay online. In fact,



## AREAS OF CONCERN



SAFETY



BACK-AND-FORTH



FALLING BEHIND



MOVING TOO FAST



TRANSIT



MENTAL HEALTH



CHILDCARE

our open-ended question, which asked students “if you said you don’t feel safe, please explain why.” Received a total of 186 responses from students (56%) when given the opportunity.

The results were interesting because only students who did not feel safe were given the opportunity to tell us why, and they weren’t all COVID related (though, most reasons were).

Some students expressed that they didn’t feel safe moving from online to in-person because they felt a mid-semester move would severely impact their grades. While other students expressed they were worried about what, if any COVID safety measures would be in place, they were worried about falling behind due to illness or people coming to class sick, others felt that it was just too early and they would end up back online anyway, some feel like the Government of Alberta is rushing opening back up and that universities should be waiting to see the effects of decreased restrictions, many were worried about being exposed to COVID-19 via the City of Calgary Transit system, and finally students were worried about their mental health exposing family to COVID-19 and worried they would not be able to find childcare. We will discuss these themes in more detail below.



# Themes

## COVID Safety Measures in Universities

On February 8, 2022, the Government of Alberta announced a new plan to eliminate restrictions that Albertans are facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These included an end to the Restrictions Exemption Program at midnight February 9, 2022, and potentially an end to the masking mandate on March 1, 2022.

On February 9, 2022, an open letter to post-secondary institutions was released from the office of the Minister of Advanced Education. In the letter the Government of Alberta made it clear that they expect post-secondary institutions in Alberta to align all

COVID-19 measures with their policies. This would mean an almost immediate end to the

vaccine passport program in place, and as of March 1, 2022, and end to the masking mandate in institutions. It would also mean that unvaccinated students would again be allowed onto post-secondary campuses again.

On February 15, 2022, Saitsa released a survey to their membership asking them what their feelings were about reopening. Students were able to answer an open-ended question about why they did not feel safe returning to the SAIT campus on February 28, 2022, and one of the biggest themes was worry regarding mandates. Students have been clear they are worried about the Government of Alberta and what their mandates and expectations will be going forward.



One student stated to us:

*“... the government is considering easing a bunch of other restrictions such as masking and vaccination requirements. If SAIT chooses to ease these as well on indoor premises, then I worry that the cases will soon begin to skyrocket.”*

While another says:

*“... and if the AB government removes the mandatory mask and all there is a 100% chance that all restriction is going to be implemented again and we all have to move online again. So, I need my classes to be online. Thank you!”*

Another student expresses:

*“The mask mandate needs to remain in place at SAIT regardless of whatever the UCP’s appeasement policies may be.”*

Other students did not mention the Government of Alberta but instead simply focused on how they are worried that without mandates in place COVID-19 would spread rapidly through a campus population as a student pointedly states:

*“It is shameful and embarrassing, even dangerous that*

*this decision was made. If we were going back to campus with vaccine mandates, controlled entry, social distancing and masking still, that would be tolerable and acceptable. Post-secondary campuses are the perfect spreading ground for COVID, so maybe you should get your head in the game and make some changes, because this is downright unfair to students who actually give a crap about their health and safety (and education!).”*

Another focuses on the worry about whether their pupils will be vaccinated in the classrooms:

*“With the requirements for proof of vaccination being lifted, there is no guarantee that the people attending classes with me will have been vaccinated. I can’t feel safe if I don’t know that the people around me have concern for my/others well-being.”*

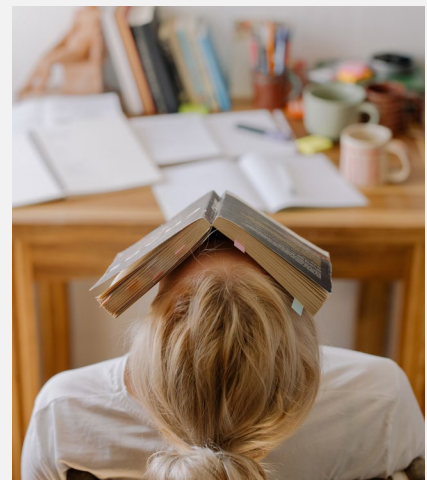
Another student agrees stating:

*“It’s ridiculously unsafe for everyone to return to campus without masks or vaccine requirements...that is literally exactly how COVID will spread even faster and affect more people...”*

Finally, another student states that they are worried that without masking mandates in place, with the cases where they are, faculty, staff, and students will end up missing classes making it more difficult for everyone involved:

*“With the school deciding to drop the masking requirement during a time of daily case counts over 1500 and positivity rates over 30% I don’t see how many students and faculty won’t get sick and miss time.”*

It was clear from our survey that students are extremely worried about how the lack of masking mandates will impact both their education, and health. The uncertainty involved, and the Government lack of mandate response going forward with reopening has clearly left students anxious.



## Falling Behind Due to Illness & Fear of People Still Coming in Sick

There was another subsection of student that focused more on the outcomes of the lack of mandates in place. Students worry that when they return to in-person only classes if they get sick, they will have to miss time and be left scrambling to catch up. Others worry how hard it would be to focus while they are ill.



As one student states:

*“it will be difficult for me to focus on my studies when I’m sick... when I got the virus, I constantly had fever and it was so hard for me to get out of bed and I was in a lot of pain. When someone gets omicron, the teachers don’t take any alternative to help the student catch up (no recording) and the class moves on in person while the sick student have no choice but to stay home to keep everyone safe.”*

A classmate agrees telling us:

*“Yes, the omicron symptoms are mild, but it is still a sickness that can take a week to recover. That also affects a student’s ability to study. I rather stay healthy and able to attend classes online. I am currently doing well and not struggling this semester...”*



Other students worry just how much class they will have to miss if they contract COVID-19:

*“.. if one was to get sick and have to stay home, how would they be able to attend class? We will potentially miss class content since it wouldn’t be delivered online anymore.”*

Another agrees:

*“I feel as if there is a lot of uncertainty with the COVID-19 variant transmission, and if someone was to get sick and can’t come to class there is a likelihood of falling behind. I also worry that due to that possibility of falling behind, students may come to class even if they feel sick.”*



If classes are not online, and someone falls ill students are left wondering: will there be accommodations or online components for them when they fall ill? Or will they be expected to try and catch up when they are back. With only seven weeks remaining in the semester that could prove challenging.



## Switching from Online to In-person with Seven Weeks to go & Fear of Just Ending up Back Online

With only seven weeks of class remaining students were worried about how such a switch would impact their education. And not only in the sense of “what happens if we get ill and have to miss a bunch of classes.” But also, in terms of uncertainty. Students have been going back and forth and would like certainty. They started the 2020 winter term in person were switched online in March 2020, came back in sept 2021 were moved back online for winter 2022 and now are being moved back to in person with only seven weeks left in the semester.



Students who were concerned about only seven weeks left were relatively in agreement with each other as to why: quality of education, and consistency:

*“Transitional periods should remain at start of semesters as first week of introductory classes can determine student add/drop adjustments in alignment with in-class learning requirements. Major learning transitions mid-semester can cause such anxiety to degrade the current progress of students readjusting to a completely different multi-stimulus environment. Mid semester transition would cause completely unnecessary readjustment and crumble student learning foundations and routines already established, as well as teaching regimens already planned by staff. Mid-semester transition completely lowers efficiency for all parties involved and can lead to anxiety about burnout.”*



*"we started the semester online we should finish online. We will only have a month and a half left of the semester. With the different breaks in the mix it's going to make it hard to get in a rhythm for the last month and a half"*

*"Being as my program MOA/Unit Clerk is so fast paced, we will already be halfway through the program. We well as the week returning we have 3 midterms which could effect our grades trying to grasp a new schedule, organize child care, and transportation."*

*"I want to keep my classes as is because to change things up mid semester would be too confusing and possibly jeopardize classes and exams."*

*"For someone like me who is taking 6 courses, a mid-semester change like this could really mess up my grades and negatively impact my mental health."*

Students have made it clear that they are worried how a mid-semester switch back to online would impact their grades, exams, and schedules.

Figure 3: Word Cloud showing the most popular words students used while expressing their worries to Saitsa



## Let's See How Lifting Mandates Go First

Many students were just upset at how fast lifting the mandates were moving. They feel like it has been rushed and we should lift mandates more slowly to see how it impacts the general population especially before bringing students back together on campuses across Alberta.



One SAIT student cuts right to the chase stating:

*"We haven't even seen an ease of restrictions yet. We should wait until the situation is more stable."*

Their peers agree with them, that it is just too early to open up again, and they would ultimately like to see what happens with the population before returning to busy campus life:

*"I would prefer we see how the city does in terms of cases without restrictions for the rest of the semester and then ultimately make the decision for the upcoming year instead of after February."*



*"I got COVID and almost died from having it, it was so much worse for me because I have other health issues. I feel every time the situation improves a little bit the government acts like everything is good and drops everything too fast because they don't want to deal with it anymore and don't know how too. They did that for summer and fall and winter got crazy worse. They want to drop all the restrictions and open everything when people are still sick, they're new variants and the vaccine doesn't work, I got deadly ill even being vaxed as well as many people! I don't even know how or where I got sick either so it seems like it could happen again, and if people get sick then we won't be able to come to class and finish the semester."*



Other SAIT students felt like generally it is just too early to be bringing students back:

*"I think it is still very early for the premiere to lift all the restrictions so abruptly. Strongly suggest to wait and let the science do the thinking from the data instead of rushing the reopening plans in full swing and scrapping the former mandates once and for all. For this reason, I would feel unsafe of coming to campus, until the end of the semester to observe how the situation plays out."*

*"COVID is constantly evolving, and we can never be too sure what the easing of restrictions will do to our health."*



## Taking Calgary Transit

Another pressing issue for students is that a lot of them take Calgary Transit to school due to the location of the school. Specifically, they take the train. Students are worried how taking transit would impact their health, and the health of students around them:

*“I don’t want to expose myself while commuting to campus and in class/on campus.”*

*As a student who has to take public transit for over an hour to get to school, I genuinely have a fear of getting attacked for wearing a mask simply because I want to in public. I’d like to think people mind their own business, but in reality, that’s not so much the case.”*

*“I have to take public transport to reach SAIT and that makes me feel unsafe with the large amount of COVID restrictions being released which means that on public transport there might be more people who aren’t wearing a mask or distancing or even just more people in general on public transport which I worry about.”*

Other SAIT students just do not feel safe on Calgary Transit yet:

*“I definitely do not feel safe traveling 2+ hours on a train packed with possibly unvaccinated and unmasked people. My labs don’t have an in-person element with the exception of 1! I would be ok with traveling for 1 class a week but for others the risk is not worth the reward.”*

*“I recently had COVID even if I made sure that I wasn’t in contact with anyone and only staying at home. What more if we were to use the subway as a daily commute where there is practically no social distancing on rush hour. I think with rising cases, our health should always be prioritized first than trying to force*



*physical classes.”*

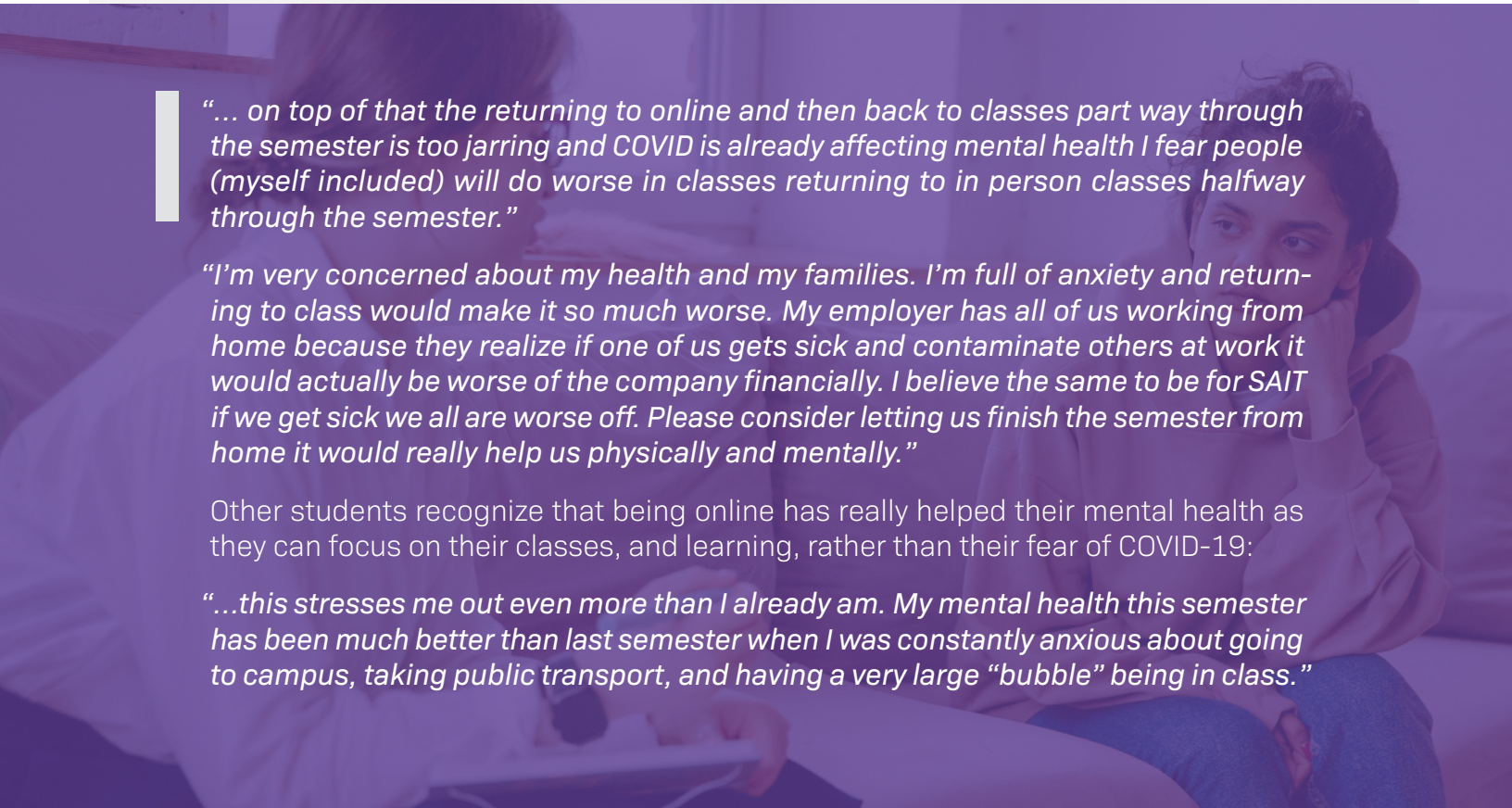
With physical distancing hard on Calgary Transit to begin with, students are worried about how they will get to school safely, but also how being in such close proximity with other people, including unmasked and unvaccinated fellow Calgarians, will impact their health and the health of their classmates. Students are worried that with so many of them taking Calgary Transit, this could be a potentially way that the Omicron variant will make its way onto campus and spread like wildfire.

## Mental Health

There is a wealth of literature available that indicates that there is a link between student academic success, and student mental well-being (Alberta Post-Secondary Mental Health and Addictions Framework, 2015; Cheng et al, 2021; American College Health Association, 2019; Hartey et al, 2017). Equally so, there is an abundance of literature that indicates that universities across Canada were having a “mental health” crisis pre COVID-19, and the Pandemic has Exacerbated that issue (Alberta Post-Secondary Mental Health and Addictions Framework, 2015; American College Health Association, 2019; Bartlett, 2014; Buote et al, 2007; Cheng et al, 2021; Son et al, 2020; BC Partners for Mental Health and Addiction Information, 2008; Canadian Association of College and University Student Services and Canadian Mental Health Association, 2013;

Canadian Mental Health Association, 2021; Center for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, 2021; Hartey & Wells, 2017; Hefner, 2009; Lipson, 2009; McMaster University 2021; Mental Health Commission of Canada 2021; Kwakye, 2020; Okanagan Charter, 2015; Raghacan, 2014; Reid, 2015; Rashid, 2020; Riwi, 2020; Shepell, 2021(c); The Jed Foundation, 2017).

As we can see from above it is clear that research has shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has been a toll on student mental health. SAIT students recognize this and were quick to point out in our survey how they have noticed their own mental health has taken a turn, and they fear that by bringing them back to in-person classes SAIT will increase their stress and anxiety.



*“... on top of that the returning to online and then back to classes part way through the semester is too jarring and COVID is already affecting mental health I fear people (myself included) will do worse in classes returning to in person classes halfway through the semester.”*

*“I’m very concerned about my health and my families. I’m full of anxiety and returning to class would make it so much worse. My employer has all of us working from home because they realize if one of us gets sick and contaminate others at work it would actually be worse of the company financially. I believe the same to be for SAIT if we get sick we all are worse off. Please consider letting us finish the semester from home it would really help us physically and mentally.”*

Other students recognize that being online has really helped their mental health as they can focus on their classes, and learning, rather than their fear of COVID-19:

*“...this stresses me out even more than I already am. My mental health this semester has been much better than last semester when I was constantly anxious about going to campus, taking public transport, and having a very large “bubble” being in class.”*



## Family & Childcare

Finally, our survey made it clear that students are very scared for not just themselves but their families as well. Particularly those members that are unable to receive the vaccine. Many of our students have either younger siblings that are ineligible to be vaccinated or very young kids that are also ineligible for the vaccine due to age. They are anxious about how a return to in-person learning will impact their family members.

*"I have two vulnerable seniors at home, three kids, I don't need the additional risk since it isn't required. All lectures are fine online.... It doesn't make sense to go back to in person with COVID, get babysitting for the 4yo, waking up to drive and park \$\$\$\$ just to sit in a lab on my laptop... much less COVID implications."*

*"I have a 1-year-old son at home and despite the fact that I am double vaccinated and boosted I have no interest in risking the change that I bring something home with me that he catches as he is not able to receive a vaccine yet."*

*"I have a baby at home who fell very ill due to COVID and I had to stop her from attending daycare since my classes are online. Now going back to in-person classes will only put her in more risk"*

*"Having COVID-19 is painful and terrible not just for me but for the rest of us in our family especially for someone who has a little sibling (toddler) who isn't vaccinated."*

Other students worry about their vulnerable family members that may be immunocompromised or elderly:

*"...Also what if students are living in a home where there are other more immunocompromised and vulnerable people? That student will be forced to choose between going to school or keeping their loved ones safe."*

*"I know for a fact a lot of students might be having their grandmas or any other seniors at their house and would like to protect them of*



*course."*

*"I live with someone who is immune compromised, and we both have respiratory issues as well, I don't want to put anyone at risk more than I have to."*

*"I have an immunocompromised partner at home and having classes online makes me feel safer."*

Finally, students were worried about how such a change would impact their work schedules and childcare schedules. Especially for those students who, once they went to online learning, had to pull their children from daycare (effectively losing their spot):

*"we already have the schedule for working or childcare. It's not easy just change that right away."*

*"It does not make sense to go back to in person with COVID, get babysitting for the 4yo, waking up to drive and park \$\$\$\$ just to sit in a lab on my laptop."*



# What are Other Institutions Doing?

**As of February 17, 2022, major universities in Alberta have released some information on what returning to campus will look like. Below you will find a summary.**



## Mount Royal University

Mount Royal University released a statement on February 9, 2022, stating that there would be “no immediate campus changes as province lifts some measures” (Mount Royal University, 2022). Currently, Mount Royal University has said that the vaccine mandate will stay in place and that “individuals may not attend in-person unless they: are fully immunized, have received an accommodation and are participating in rapid testing, or are children unable to receive the vaccine” (Mount Royal University, 2022).



## University of Calgary

The University of Calgary released a statement on February 8, 2022, also directly in response to the Government of Alberta’s announcement stating that they will also have “no immediate changes to the University of Calgary’s Vaccination Directive or masking mandate” (University of Calgary, 2022). The University of Calgary has a similar policy to Mount Royal Universities which states students, staff, faculty, and visitors will still be required to mask up and must be “fully vaccinated and provide proof of vaccination or provide in advance proof of a negative Health Canada approved rapid antigen, rapid PCR or lab-based PCR test completed within the previous 72 hours from attending University Facilities, at their own expense.” (University of Calgary, 2022).



## Bow Valley College

Bow Valley College, in Calgary, released a statement that effective February 14, 2022, they would be phasing in in-person classes but that masks would remain mandatory indoors at all of their campus locations, and anyone accessing those campuses must be fully vaccinated. Students will also be required to show their Student ID cards to access campus.



## University of Alberta

The University of Alberta released a letter from their President, Bill Flanagan, on February 10, 2022, which outlined how in-person classes would resume at the end of February. In his letter he outlined that no changes to marks requirements would be made at this time and masking in all indoor University of Alberta spaces would still be required (University of Alberta, 2022). Bill also made it clear that students should be staying home when they are sick, and all employees who are essential to campus have already been informed and will be making their way back while other employees will continue to work from home (University of Alberta, 2022). If the hospitalizations continue to trend downward and the province lifts the work from home order, the University will review at that time (University of Alberta, 2022).



## St. Mary's University

St. Mary's University issued their statements on February 8, 2022, stating that their COVID Taskforce would be meeting to discuss what, if any, policy changes would be made but until that update is sent out all St. Mary's students will still be required to show the safety App for proof of vaccination, and will be required to wear masks indoors (St. Mary's University, 2022). No other public updates are showing on their website as of February 17, 2022.



## MacEwan University

On February 11, 2022, MacEwan University has stated that their mandates will remain in effect until the end of the winter semester (MacEwan University, 2022). The University states that "students registered in the Winter term have met our vaccination requirements for coming to campus. The university will maintain the existing mask standard until the end of the winter term: when you come to campus, please help us keep our community safe by continuing to wear a mask in instructional and common spaces" (MacEwan University, 2022).



## SAIT

The latest information posted to SAIT's website on February 8, 2022, states that "effective immediately students and employees are no longer required to be fully vaccinated to attend on campus" and that "we will maintain our mask mandate through to March 1, at which point the wearing of masks will become recommended, rather than mandatory." (SAIT, 2022).



## NAIT

NAIT released a statement on February 8, 2022, that they are reviewing the mandate policy but for now public health measures will remain on campus "including vaccination requirements, wearing a mask in all indoor public spaces, staying at home when sick, and maintaining at least 2 meters of physical distance in common areas and retail spaces.

**As we can see, almost all major universities in Alberta are choosing to keep masking and vaccine mandates in place for the time being, regardless of the new Government of Alberta policy.**



# What are Medical Professionals Saying?



When the Government of Alberta announced plans to stop the Restriction Exemption Program and end masking in March, Alberta Doctors were quick to sound the alarm. Many doctors are calling the Government of Alberta's decision both "reckless" and "irresponsible" (CTV News (a), 2022). Medical experts are so alarmed by the Government of Alberta decision that they sent an open letter to the Premier. The 25 experts who signed the letter have experience in public health, infectious diseases, and social epidemiology (CTV News (a), 2022).

What is particularly interesting in the letter is that they expressed concern that the Government of Alberta appears to be removing freedoms from post-secondary institutions and school boards to make decisions about the health of their students, and over all campuses (CTV News (a), 2022). On February 8, 2022, the Government of Alberta informed school boards that they would not be able to bring in their own mask mandates, and on February 9, 2022, an open letter was sent to post-secondary institutions that they are expected to reopen without physical

distancing, masking (as of March 1, 2022), and will immediately end all vaccine mandates (Government of Alberta (c), 2022). Doctor Simon Otto told CTV News that "ignoring the evidence and dismissing the concerns and fears of parents, students, and educators is dangerous and irresponsible overstep by the government" he further states that "now is absolutely not the time to make these drastic changes" (CTV News (a), 2022).

Doctor Otto isn't the only doctor sounding the alarm Dr. Gibney, a University of Alberta professor in the department of critical care medicine, stated to CTV "we have the highest amount of patients in hospital with COVID since the pandemic first started, and we are having 100 people die every week in the province from COVID, the worry with this is if we actually release these measures too soon that we could find that we actually do not fall as we should fall, and we end up with a prolonged wave" (CTV News (b), 2022).

Speaking with the Economy Doctor Gibney said "What we've heard today is wishful thinking

and an element of COVID denial where the government is saying, 'really, this isn't a problem anymore,' while we still have a major Omicron surge causing pressure on our hospital systems. The numbers that Mr. Kenney presented today were of active cases in a system where the testing is really only of a tiny proportion of the number of people that actually have active COVID infections in the province at the moment, and so I think to even discuss those numbers, it's misleading" (2022).

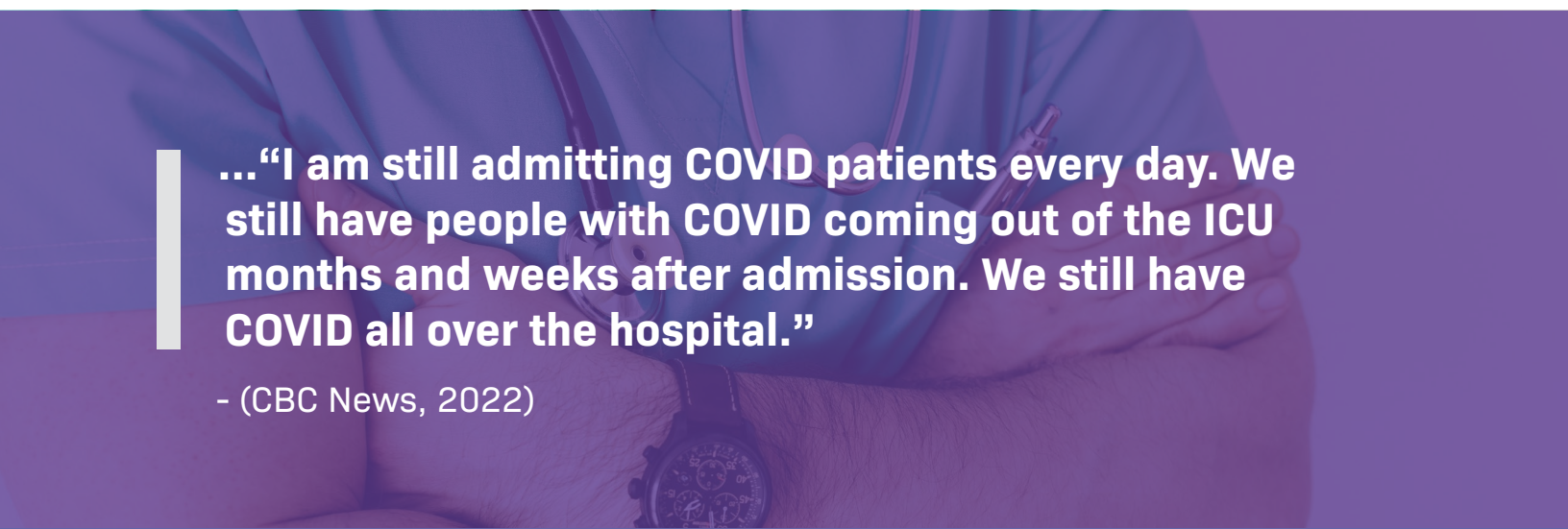
Doctor Gibney also commented to CBC News stating "to reduce the public health restrictions at a time when we have unprecedented congestion in our hospitals, because of patients with COVID, really doesn't make much logical sense to me. Potentially we are going to find ourselves in a prolonged wave of Omicron at a time when really that's not necessary. It shouldn't happen and it's preventable" (2022).

Other doctors also worry it is too early to reopen as well. Doctor Fabreau who works at the Peter Lougheed Centre told CBC News "I am still admitting COVID patients every day. We still have people with COVID coming out of the ICU months and weeks after admission. We still have COVID all over the hospital" (CBC News, 2022). A quick glance at the Government of Alberta's own outbreak numbers shows that every hospital in Calgary is operating at over 100% capacity and have outbreaks. Doctor Fabreau told CBC News that "It

is completely full of patients that are emergency department patients and even some admitted patients that are just overflowing" (CBC News, 2022). Doctors are not the only medical professionals voicing their concerns with this policy change, nurses are also concerned Heather Smith president of the United Nurses of Alberta told CBC News that "it's incredibly disappointing. I think it's reckless. But I can't say I was surprised. I think this government wants to prove it can do things faster than anybody else even if it's not the right thing to do." (CBC News, 2022).

Doctor Smith, a University of Alberta physician is also worried about what reopening too soon will mean. Telling the Economy that "Some of the other recommendations, even in Step 1, seem a little bit surprising, I guess. Removing too many restrictions at once, I think, may make it a little bit more difficult for the health-care system to try to recover since we're really still at the peak of our hospitalizations."

Such comments from doctors would indicate that student worries about how it is too soon to reopen and that they fear for not only their health but the health of their families, and that they worry they will just end up back online again, appear to not only be accurate worries, but based on the experience of doctors and experts is likely to happen if the Government of Alberta continues to venture down a path that leads to reopening too soon.



**...“I am still admitting COVID patients every day. We still have people with COVID coming out of the ICU months and weeks after admission. We still have COVID all over the hospital.”**

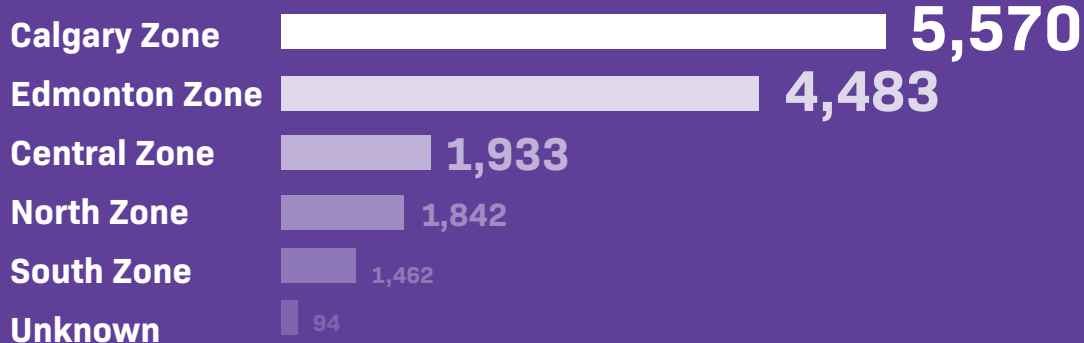
- (CBC News, 2022)

# Conclusion

There is no denying that COVID numbers remain high, albeit they are dropping. However, the Omicron wave has been extremely contagious adding to anxiety and mental health issues among students. As of February 17, 2022, Alberta has 1,491 people in hospitals, 116 in the ICU, and 16,551 active cases with a positivity rate of approximately 27% (Government of Alberta (a), 2022). Alberta is also seeing the highest number of hospitalizations so far through this pandemic. These numbers are based on PCR tests administered by Alberta Health Services staff, and do not include numbers from at home rapid tests which is arguably the main source of testing in Alberta. Alberta stopped granting access to everyone with symptoms during the Omicron wave because they were unable to keep up due to how contagious the variant was. Further, according to active

cases via Alberta Health Services, Calgary has the highest active case count (CBC News, 2022).

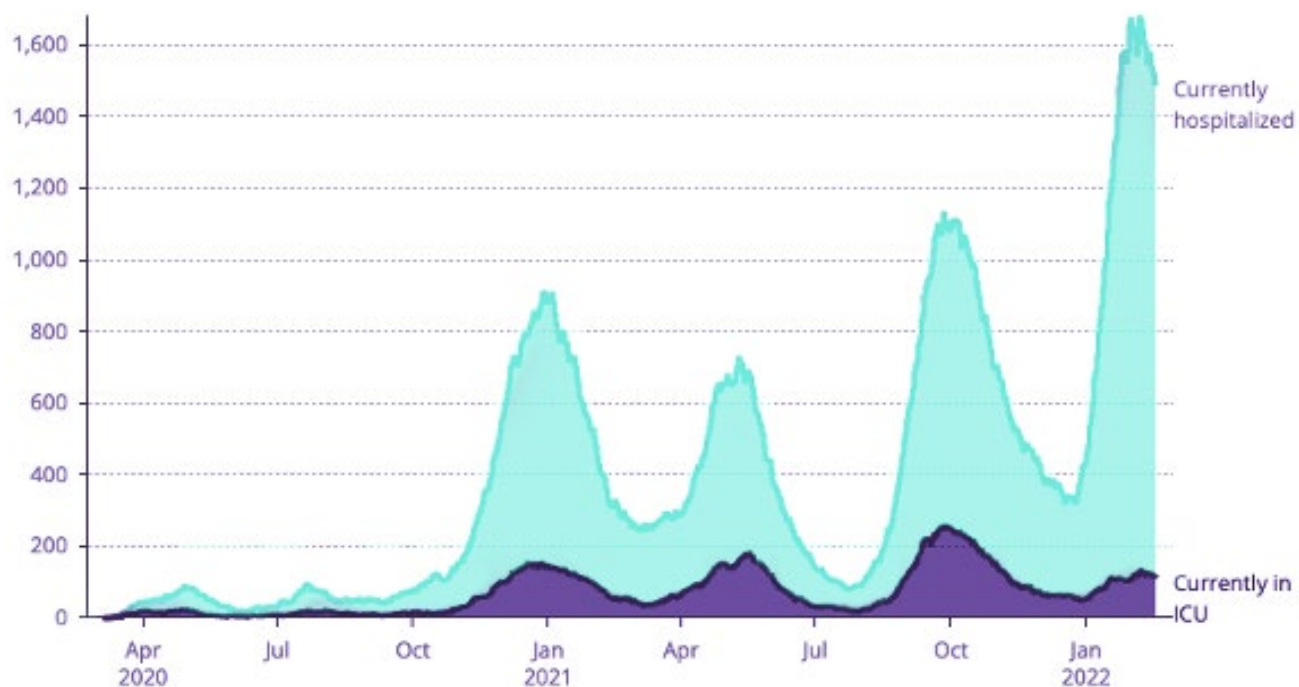
At the time of writing this report, PCR testing is only available for those Albertans who have “Clinical risk factors for severe outcomes and those who live and work in high-risk settings” (Government of Alberta (b), 2022). Therefore, we should assume cases are higher than reported, and in fact Dr. Hinshaw told the Canadian Press that “we should assume that at minimum we’re seeing about 10 times more the number of cases that we’re diagnosing through PCR [tests] (The Canadian Press, 2022). COVID-19 is still spreading throughout our community and given the contagious factor of the Omicron variant, has the potential to take off again if we reopen fully too fast.



*\*Active cases include both community cases and hospitalizations*

Figure 4: Active Case Counts in Alberta, via CBC News 2022

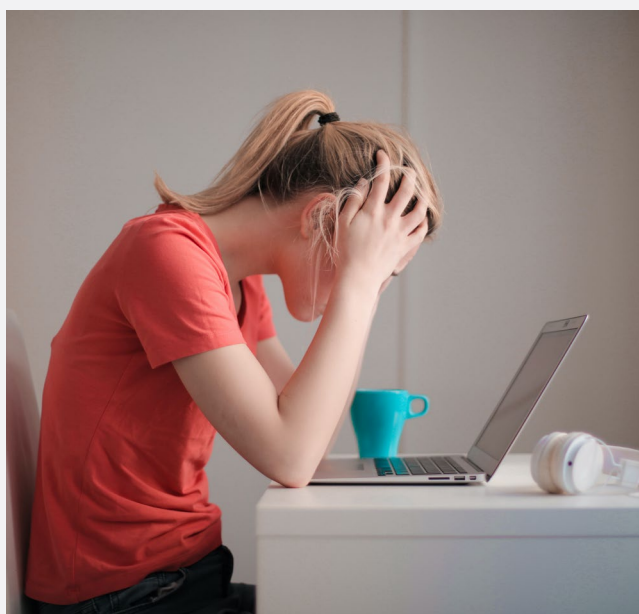




CBC NEWS

Chart: CBC • Source: Alberta Health

Figure 5: COVID-19 Hospitalizations, via CBC News 2022



Research has consistently shown that when compared to other industries and situations students suffered more with mental health issues than any other group (Kwakyee & Kibort-Crocker, 2020; Cheng et al, 2021; Morneau Shepell, 2021(a); Morneau Shepell, 2021(b). Riwi,2021; McMaster University, 2021) and as such it could be argued that the Government and Institutions should take extra care during reopening plans for universities.



**Therefore, based on the research conducted with SAIT students, and all other information available to us, it is the opinion of the Saitsa Board of Directors that:**

- 1** Students are disappointed that they were not consulted before major changes were going to be made to the delivery of their classes.
- 2** Students do not want to return to in-person classes for just 7 weeks.
- 3** The Saitsa Board of Directors are disappointed that the Government of Alberta is pressuring post-secondary institutions both publicly and privately to have a full return to campus in March 2022.

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