

Submission to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology

Canadian Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Thank you for the opportunity to express our views on what Canada requires to respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Basic Income Calgary is a collaborative action group, composed of representatives from community organizations and professional associations and individuals, and informally affiliated with the Basic Income Canada Network (BICN). We would like to express support for the recommendations put forward by BICN (in a brief submitted to your Committee, published May 29, 2020¹). While as a group we encouraged dialogue around basic income and in the past endorsed only a set of principles² that we believed must guide its implementation, and not a specific design, we feel compelled, in response to the COVID-19 crisis, **to ask that the federal government act decisively now to introduce a basic income guarantee model for 18-64 year olds, based on the best available evidence in Canada at this moment, and consistent with programs for seniors and children that have demonstrated success.**

The COVID-19 crisis and its economic reverberations have magnified and raised the stakes of an inequality and insecurity crisis that has been building for the past few decades. Policy makers and the public have known that steep inequality breeds social ills, that employment is precarious, that technology is disrupting livelihoods, and that many people are only a paycheck or two away from personal financial crisis. We have known that the work of people who keep us fed and cared for – especially women and racialized people – has been consistently unpaid, underpaid and undervalued. We know that sexism, racism and legacies of colonialism create disadvantage and harm—and that our planet is endangered. Not enough has been done to counter those trends. Public policy now must be designed deliberately. As the Government takes steps to ensure a long-term recovery from COVID-19, it is imperative that you consider the interrelated crises of rising wealth inequality along gender and racial lines, climate change and racism. **Part of a plan for a recovery that is just and inclusive and that builds solid ground for inclusive growth in the future, is a basic income guarantee.**

When we think about economic security, the Canadian public policies that have been most effective in improving security and wellbeing and in reducing inequality and poverty are ones that provide **regular, unconditional income guarantees**. It is this kind of success we should be looking to build on. Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors and benefits for adults with children under 18

¹ <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/431/INDU/Brief/BR10775477/br-external/BasicIncomeCanadaNetwork-e.pdf>

² Available at: <https://basicincomecalgary.ca/>

(now called the Canada Child Benefit), along with provincial/territorial add-ons, have helped those populations weather economic ups and down for decades and have provided economic stimulus as well. They are also working during this pandemic.

For many 18-64-year-old adults who are left out of those benefit programs, insecurity has been profound. This is especially true for single people in a reality where it takes most households two incomes to get by. Finding and keeping a job, getting decent pay and working conditions, and qualifying for Employment Insurance are all much harder than before. As for the last resort of provincially-provided social assistance, income is provided in a way that remains unrelentingly miserly, punitive and debasing of human dignity, while benefits barely cover 50% of the cost of living.

Canada's emergency measures, which have provided much-needed financial support for those whose lives and livelihoods were put on hold due to the pandemic, must transition into a basic income to recover and rebuild a better, new normal.

A post-COVID economy is going to be greatly different than it was before—and all forms of work and employment will be different. Making the future better will require change and transition. Transition is often an uncomfortable and frightening prospect for humans. A basic income provides a foundation of stability and security, a measure of confidence and a level of trust in government that will make good outcomes possible.

We believe that a basic income guarantee – defined as a regular, predictable income provided by government, universally and unconditionally available to all who need it, and sufficient to provide for a decent lifestyle and enable full participation in the community – is a policy choice that makes sense now more than ever.

It has the potential to protect everyone as we restart and transition our economy, support entrepreneurial and innovation activity and resulting job creation, generate significant economic activity through boosted household spending, protect those precariously employed or underemployed, recognize the contributions to society of unpaid caregiving and volunteer work, and enable many to improve their own and their family's wellbeing and economic security, thus improving social and health outcomes, while reducing criminal justice and health care costs.³

We would like to express support for the recommendations proposed by the Basic Income Canada Network (in a brief submitted to your Committee, published May 29, 2020), and ask that the federal government act decisively now to introduce a basic income guarantee model for 18-64 year olds, based on the best available evidence in Canada at this moment, and consistent with programs for seniors and children that have demonstrated success.⁴

³ For an inspiring account of the ways that participants of a recent basic income pilot in Ontario benefited from such support, see: <https://labourstudies.mcmaster.ca/news/access-southern-ontario2019s-basic-income-experience-report>.

⁴ Canadian evidence in support of a BI is showcased in BICN's report *Basic Income: Some Policy Options for Canada*, available at: https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/bicn/pages/3725/attachments/original/1579707497/Basic_Income-Some_Policy_Options_for_Canada2.pdf?1579707497

We join the specific BICN recommendations:

- 1. That the federal government establish a basic income guarantee for 18-64 year olds comparable to the CERB monthly amount of \$2000, ensuring that some benefits continue into the middle-income deciles, consistent with the design and principles of Option One in *Basic Income: Some Policy Options for Canada* (https://www.basicincomecanada.org/policy_options - https://www.basicincomecanada.org/revenu_de_base). This option recognizes that a small boost in income will also be needed for low-income seniors, especially single seniors, in order to ensure fairness.**
- 2. That the federal government consult and work with recognized academic and non-government experts who have been researching, working for a basic income and developing policy design for Canada as well as those who have expertise in developing and implementing related pilots and programs.**
- 3. That the federal government lead in immediately adopting a basic income guarantee in response to the pandemic and as a way to recover and rebuild the economy, adapting as evidence may require, while working towards a fully national basic income, in collaboration with provinces, territories, municipalities and First Nations, to ensure that all orders of government contribute and benefit fairly and that other necessary changes and supports are made appropriately to ensure that no one is left behind.**

The many reasons for a basic income are reflected in the breadth of support for it. The call is coming from public health officers and tech entrepreneurs to Indigenous leaders, dozens of Senators, major faith and youth organizations, and those working for gender equality, racial justice, food security, a more resilient economy, the environment, a stronger democracy, and more.

As we continue to respond to the COVID-19 health crisis and prepare to rebuild, people and organizations all across Canada want our governments to know that we cannot go back to the way things were. We can't go back to business-as-usual. We cannot recover from the current crisis by re-entrenching systems that will cause the next crisis. Federal leadership matters, and your action matters to the lives and livelihoods of the people you have committed to serve. Let us build a Canada where no one is forced to live a life of economic insecurity and poverty.

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