

# Is Money the Answer to Everything?

by Hugo Tartaglia

What if everyone in Canada regularly received money directly deposited into their bank accounts? How does 1000\$ a month sound? Well, we may soon find out. This idea is known as Universal Basic Income (or Basic Guaranteed Income). And this somewhat-revolutionary approach to the “welfare-state” is actually quite simple. Every person of a given country would receive regular payments from the government – no strings attached. But this isn’t just a proposal made by folks in [Silicon Valley](#) to buffer against future job loss created by automation. Indeed, basic income isn’t even a partisan issue – people on the left and right alike have demonstrated support for this idea.<sup>1,2</sup>

In fact, much support for some form of basic income is coming from those in the medical and public health community. This is because of the longstanding association found between income and health.<sup>3-7</sup> The data is in, and it’s quite clear: the more money you have, the better your health outcomes are, in general. (Mental health included!)

Social determinations of health are social factors that will influence the state of your health; this could be anything from education to food security and housing. And income is a strong determinant of health. But why? Likely because it allows us to have our basic needs met. That means good food, proper housing and resilience to those unexpected life events when they do occur. In her recent book *Better Now*, Dr. Danielle Martin lists Basic Guaranteed Income as one of six big ideas that can improve healthcare for all Canadians. “The biggest disease that needs to be cured in Canada is the disease of poverty”, she writes.<sup>8</sup> Basic Income for Canadians could therefore seriously address the health problems associated with a lower income.

However, many people are concerned about the costs of such a program. While there is debate on what form Basic Income could take in Canada, there are several benefits to most schemes. For one thing, basic income would eliminate many administrative costs with our current welfare programs and eliminate many of the hurdles for those seeking (and needing) support.<sup>9</sup>

Navigating through the system to be eligible for some of these programs is sometimes incredibly challenging and infantilizing. Removing some of these barriers and having the money go directly to individuals - no questions asked - would free up unnecessary costs created by the current system. And more importantly, it would mean trusting people to make their own choices with how they spend money. Secondly, sick people cost the healthcare system money. A basic income program would be a measure towards helping prevent people from getting sick in the first place and then making sure that when people do get sick, they have the extra means to cope with it.

Canada already has a version of basic income, but we just know it more commonly as Old Age Security (for seniors over 65) and the Canada Child Benefit (for children under 18). Ideally, the goal would be to fill in the gap between the two, to extend the social safety-net and to have *all* people be covered throughout their life. This could mean a healthier population, among one of many possible benefits.

Basic Income isn't a particularly new concept in Canada, either. Back in the 1970s, in a joint effort between Manitoba's Provincial NDP government and the Federal Liberal Government, Canada ran a basic income experiment; known today as MINCOME. However, the objective at the time was to determine whether guaranteed income would decrease people's willingness to work. Though they generally found that that wasn't the case, there also wasn't much data specifically collected about the consequent effects on people's health.<sup>10,11</sup> Despite that, in a later analysis conducted in 2011, it was found that hospitalizations (especially for accidents and mental health diagnoses) decreased for those who received MINCOME compared to a group who did not receive any guaranteed income.<sup>12</sup>

Currently, Canada is undergoing another [pilot project](#) for a version of basic income in several towns in Ontario. (They will be paying close attention to health outcomes, this time.) Thus far, the prospects seem [positive](#). But we'll soon find out more, and Basic Income may one day become a reality for all Canadians.

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