



### Join the Conversation

This is one part of a series. Look for all our basic income modules and other resources at [basicincomecanada.org](http://basicincomecanada.org)

## HEALTH

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If there is one thing all Canadians can agree on, it's that health matters. Our health begins far earlier than doctors and hospitals though. It actually starts with the way we set up our society. There are many questions we need to ask when it comes to our overall health. These include:

Who has money and who doesn't? Do we have jobs, and if so what are the conditions like? Do we have access to the health and social services we need, whenever we need it? Can we get the kind of education we need? Is our housing adequate?

These questions, in other words, are about the living conditions we experience. (Social scientists call these living conditions the 'social determinants of health.')

*“Decades of studies have shown that health care accounts for less than 25% of health outcomes. The upstream factors that affect health — such as income, education, employment, housing, and food security — have a far greater impact on whether we will be ill or well.”*

*- Dr. Ryan Meili and  
Dr. Danielle Martin*

Money – also known as income and income distribution – is the most important factor to consider overall. According to Dr. Dennis Raphael of York University, income inequality is associated with the premature death of 40,000 Canadians a year, equal to 110 Canadians dying prematurely each day.

He says to “imagine a Bombardier CS-100 jet airplane full of passengers falling out of the sky every day for a year.” That's what income inequality is like in Canada – it's harming our health and making us die younger. Too many people in Canada are living in poverty. The cost of poverty in Canada as a whole was estimated at \$72 billion to \$84 billion, according to a 2008 study by the Ontario Association of Food Banks.

Evidence suggests that a basic income guarantee could make a great difference in improving standards of living and health outcomes. It would also cost less to all of us in the long run.

### Mental Health

Canadians in the lowest income group are three to four times more likely than those in the highest income group to report poor to fair mental health. Think about how less stressful it would be for the thousands of Canadians living below the poverty line to have their basic needs met. Too much anxiety

is not beneficial for our mental health. Instead of only throwing money at mental health ‘programs,’ we could take a huge mental strain off people by giving them a basic income guarantee.

For those people receiving the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), about half of them are living with a mental illness, according to the Canadian Mental Health Association. We know that a disproportionate number of people with mental illness live in poverty – something a basic income promises to address. Given that people with disabilities tend to have more needs, a basic income should be set at a higher level for people with disabilities.

According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, in any given year, one in five people in Canada experiences a mental illness or addiction and more than 6.7 million people

are living with a mental illness or addiction today. The Commission estimates that the economic burden of mental illness and addictions in Canada is \$51 billion per year. How much of this could be addressed by taking the worry of poverty off people’s shoulders so there is less anxiety in the first place?

A basic income could take the weight of poverty away from families which could also lessen the burden on hospital emergency room visits and the criminal justice system.

### **Mental health and seniors**

In one study, self-reported rates of physical and mental health improved considerably after the age of 65. That’s when people become eligible for Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement, which suggests that bringing in basic income for the general population would mean significant healthcare savings and better mental health.

## **KEY FACTS**

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- The Canadian Medical Association passed a motion in support of basic income in 2015.
- Income inequality is associated with the premature death of 40,000 Canadians a year
- Unconditional cash payments tend to lead to improved mental health in communities.
- Countries with higher rates of income inequality have correspondingly higher levels of health and social problems across all income levels, including lower life expectancy, math and literacy scores, and trust, and higher levels of obesity, mental illness, and violence.

## **DID YOU KNOW?**

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1 in 7 Canadian children live in poverty, according to Statistics Canada, 2015. This rate places Canada 15 out of 17 among similar developed countries.

Single individuals receiving social assistance have incomes as low as 45% of Statistic Canada’s Low Income Measure – a widely accepted measure of poverty.