

RETHINKING WORK AND INCOME SECURITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY: The Case for Basic Income and Work



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INTRODUCTION



Work, the workplace, and the workforce have changed significantly – mostly for the worse – since the Economic Council of Canada’s 1990 Good Jobs/Bad Jobs report concluded that “The labour market is offering economic security to fewer Canadians.” Precarious work has grown dramatically over the past few decades, reflecting a new normal faced by a growing majority of today’s workers. This precarity is not offset by economic growth. As the 2018 Getting Left Behind report from the Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) research group revealed, despite seven years of consistent economic expansion, temporary jobs were growing in number much faster than permanent jobs¹. Some 40 percent of workers reported that employment anxiety was interfering with their personal and family lives².

At the same time, social assistance programs have become employment and poverty traps. They deny Canadians dignity and lives free from surveillance and stigmatization. What’s more, these stingy programs rob people of the ability to make effective decisions for their families, threatening people with food insecurity (i.e., hunger) and diminished housing options. Social programs have become over-bureaucratized and far less supportive of people who are often in dire need of help. Indeed, social assistance programs are too often punitive. The professional staff delivering them are not only overworked but also face dense thickets of competing rules and regulations. The result? Frequent burnout and ill health among these workers.

¹ Wayne Lewchuk et al., ‘Getting Left Behind’ (McMaster University, June 2018). https://pepso.ca/documents/pepso-glb-final-lores_2018-06-18_r4-for-website.pdf

² Lewchuk et al., p. 55.

These seismic changes underline the need for a national basic income program that would signal a new era of social and economic support – a program that would address the income inequality and income insecurity that permeate today's society.

The need for a basic income has only become more urgent in light of the current global pandemic which has resulted in the highest unemployment rate since the Great Depression, in addition to hundreds of thousands of workers with reduced hours, on caregiving leave, or on sick leave. Piecemeal programs mean that some people fall through the cracks without adequate income security. And there is a risk that the trends towards precarious and low wage work will only be exacerbated as our economy reopens and employers look to cut costs.

In 2019, well before this public health crisis began, the Ontario Basic Income Network (OBIN) convened a one-day workshop in Toronto to examine the potential impact of a basic income on paid and unpaid work and on the health and well-being of workers.

The workshop brought together participants from a number of different areas: the Ontario basic income (BI) pilot project, advocates for low-income and disabled persons and precarious workers, social service workers, experts in social determinants of health, trade unionists, faith leaders, and policy researchers. Throughout the course of the day, participants examined the relationship between work, workers, and basic income. They considered the lived experience of pilot participants in Ontario and around the world, and discussed the possible impacts of a basic income if implemented more broadly.

This sharing of knowledge, stories, and experiences was designed not as a promotional exercise, but as a way of developing a more robust understanding of the possibilities and challenges of basic income. With the changes in our world since the onset of Covid-19, the insights shared during this event are more relevant than ever. The pandemic has pointed out most dramatically the risks and vulnerabilities of trying to earn a living, and the need for basic income as part of ensuring an adequate income for all people in Canada.

PROBLEMS WITH TODAY'S SYSTEM

1

Our social assistance system is broken and is not working for recipients, caseworkers, or communities. The system has too many restrictions and often overlooks and/or misunderstands the symptoms related to poverty. Social assistance benefits also are far below poverty lines. Together, these factors contribute to worsening the poverty gap that spawns social assistance programs in the first place³.

- ➔ One participant pointed to an OPSEU study that found there were simply too many cases in our social assistance system – and too many restrictions. Instead of helping people, caseworkers had become clerks gathering data⁴.
- ➔ Social assistance caseworkers also face the difficulty of dealing with constant negativity and despair – a condition that has an impact on both Ontario Works (OW) recipients and caseworkers. An inordinate amount of power is invested in the social assistance worker because of the number of rules that allow the worker to be punitive. There is no directive that says caseworkers have to pursue the best interest of the clients. No supervisor provides guidance on how to enforce rules – only referees hearing claimant appeals can decide how to enforce contradictory rules. The rules and guidelines change frequently.
- ➔ The brokenness of social assistance and the persistence of poverty has repercussions in the health care system.

³ Kaylie Tiessen, Ontario's Social Assistance Poverty Gap (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2016).

⁴ Ontario Public Service Employees Union, Recommendations to Reform Social Assistance from the Front Line (Toronto, Ontario: Ontario Public Service Employees Union, 21 September 2018).

“Health providers themselves have difficulty seeing workers whose symptoms are related to poverty. As a health provider, ‘How do you address and fix the poverty a patient is living?’ Health care is also patchwork. If a person is in the hospital, they get medications free of charge, but if they’re outside of a hospital, they have to pay for the medication and often must go without.”⁵

– Session participant

- ➔ The Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction has been advocating for an evidence-based approach to setting social assistance rates. This included establishing a Rates Board that would set the rates regionally, based on the actual costs of living (similar to a living wage). Some 75 percent of people using Ontario food banks today are receiving assistance from either Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) – which illustrates the outrageousness of a social program that does not allow for basic human needs. There has been a 27 percent increase in the past three years in the proportion of adults with employment income using Ontario food banks⁶. Ontario’s social assistance system essentially legislates poverty, food insecurity, and unemployment.
- ➔ One Ontario basic income pilot participant spoke of the enormous change he experienced when going from OW to the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), as the latter program provided a guaranteed and unconditional income.

“The longer you’re on social assistance, the more challenges you have, especially with mental health. And when you have mental health issues, you’re unable to get a job. Basic income gives people enough self-esteem and security that they can actually go out and seek out employment.”⁷

– Ontario Basic Income Pilot Participant

⁵ See also Caroline Hensley et al., ‘Poverty, Transportation Access, and Medication Nonadherence’, *Pediatrics* 141, no. 4 (1 April 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-3402>.

⁶ Amanda King and Ashley Quan, ‘2019 Hunger Report’ (Toronto, Ontario, 2019).

⁷ See also Faraz V Shahidi et al., ‘The Impact of Social Assistance Programs on Population Health: A Systematic Review of Research in High-Income Countries’, *BMC Public Health* 19, no. 1 (December 2019): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-6337-1>.

2

Precarious work is growing in all sectors of the economy, with all of the attendant problems. Short-term contract, temporary, and permanent part-time jobs are increasingly prominent. Indeed, they are becoming the norm. This kind of work is causing great harm to people's general and mental health, well-being, and quality of life.

- ➔ With the rise of precarious employment across Canada, we've also seen the rise of "independent workers" in short-term contracts and doing part-time or temporary, work, including work in the "gig economy" and unpaid internships. These types of work provide little or no security, no benefits, nor enough income to support a decent life. Many of these workers are not eligible for Employment Insurance (EI) benefits. Basic income will contribute to building a stronger income-security floor for all people, regardless of their position in the labour market.

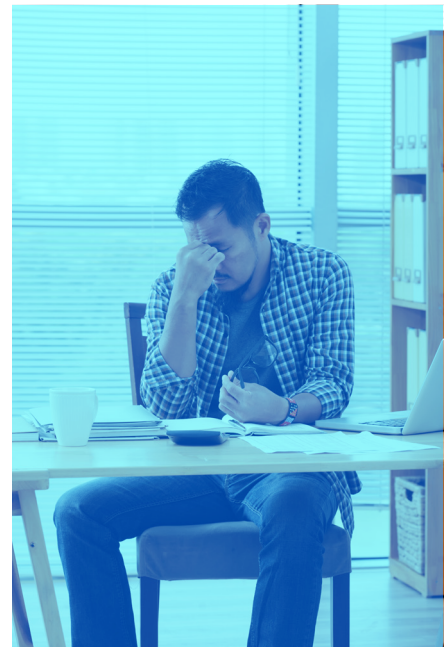


- ➔ The 2018 PEPSO study of the millennial generation (born 1982 to 1997) in Greater Hamilton found that only 44% of working millennials had jobs that were full-time, secure and with some benefits, and that 32% were precariously employed.⁸ With fewer full-time jobs and even fewer jobs with extended health benefits and pensions, income insecurity is growing. Young people are choosing not to have children; they put off marriage or home purchases because of financial costs and precarious employment. We have also seen the decline of the physical “bricks and mortar” retail stores and related jobs. The Internet, emerging technologies, and increasing speed of automation mean that millions of jobs in addition will be lost. With the trend towards self-driving trucks and cars in the automotive industry, other secondary and peripheral jobs will disappear.

3 **Insufficiency of income from employment results in more physical and emotional health problems for people. It creates barriers and increases poverty.**

- ➔ The lack of a sufficient income creates a barrier not only to obtaining work but also to making the most of employment

opportunities (e.g., covering the costs of transportation to work, appropriate clothing or attire for the job, food for lunches during work hours, childcare). When social assistance programs disallow or claw back additional income earned or received by participants, it keeps people poor and does not allow them to move forward. As a result, physical and mental health suffers. The minimum wage, despite the increases in 2018, keeps people living either in poverty or as part of the growing group of “working poor.” Most minimum-wage jobs are not full-time or full-year, but rather they are jobs in which people cannot get enough hours to survive and pay the bills. Basic income would provide a minimum floor: people would not fall below a certain income threshold regardless of how many hours they work.



⁸ p. 14, J. Martin and W. Lewchuk, The Generation Effect; Millennials, employment precarity and the 21st century workplace (Sept. 2018). McMaster University: Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario <https://pepso.ca/documents/the-generation-effect-full-report.pdf>

4

For many people, geographical distance and affordable housing are two critical barriers to securing work. Investment in public transit has fallen behind for decades, and lack of affordable housing is at a national crisis level.

➔ The lack of affordable housing and geographical distance to work are two barriers to gainful work for many people. The further away that people live from their place of work, the more they have to commute, and the more public-transit investment is required. We need to improve people's ability to afford housing closer to where they work and place a much greater emphasis and action on affordable housing and transportation in local economic development.

5

Low rates of unionization and declining strikes reflect the loss of workers' bargaining power with employers – both in terms of power and confidence. Basic income can empower all workers.

➔ Basic income can increase the bargaining power of workers, both unionized and non-unionized. Right now, workers do not have the ability to say "no." Basic income can provide security and allow workers to embrace their rights in the workplace – providing non-unionized workers in precarious work with increased individual bargaining power with bad employers and when they are in bad jobs. Even though the Supreme Court of Canada has protected the right to strike, the number of strikes in Canada has plummeted. Even unionized workers need additional forms of power in addition to the ability to take job action.

➔ While basic income can provide a context for increased empowerment, workers need to be absolutely aware of their rights. The security of a basic income would allow workers to strike with greater ease and less financial challenge because it would essentially act as a strike fund.

- ➔ Basic income and unionization go together. Some critics argue that basic income would weaken unions because employers will suggest that there is no longer a need for unions or social programs. This is one of the reasons why the labour movement is skeptical or hesitant about basic income. Basic income is one “big chunk” of the social transformation needed — one participant suggested that if unions do not reinvent themselves they could become irrelevant, and that people will begin to question the payment of union dues.

6

The expectation that people will volunteer and/or work for free is a faulty assumption, negating the value of many chosen activities. Basic income recognizes and assigns greater value to important but unpaid social activities.

- ➔ The contributions made by volunteers are significant to the economy, the community, and the individual.⁹ Volunteering can also lead to the expectation that people will work for free, that they can be readily taken advantage of. Artists, for example, are often asked to do work for the sake of “exposure,” but as one forum participant stated,

“We die from exposure.”

– Artist and Session Participant

⁹ Laurie Mook et al., ‘Accounting for the Value of Volunteer Contributions’, *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 15, no. 4 (2005): 401–15, <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.79>.



It is important that artistic and cultural workers are compensated for the art, music, writing, photography, films, and electronic games that they work so hard to create. Basic income can establish the time and space necessary for artistic or cultural endeavours to be pursued free of exploitation through the provision of a guaranteed income.¹⁰

- ➔ The “security” aspect of basic income provides people with the option to do other things, e.g., parents are able to stay home, or people can go back to school, pursue an artistic profession or a trade, volunteer in their community, and more. It improves overall well-being. Volunteering and community work can be important pathways to finding paid employment.

“I started volunteering with encouragement from my employment counsellor. Although I received some honoraria for the volunteer time, it was still ‘tokenism’ and did not reflect my investment of time, effort, etc., in the volunteer work and providing something of value to society. Basic income is a way of rewarding and recognizing those types of societal contributions. Raising families. Taking care of elders and children. Volunteering in the community.”

– Ontario Works Recipient and Session Participant, age fifty-eight

¹⁰ Leslie Regan Shade and Jenna Jacobson, ‘Hungry for the Job: Gender, Unpaid Internships, and the Creative Industries’, *The Sociological Review* 63, no. 1_suppl (May 2015): 188–205, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12249>.

"People who are affluent can afford to volunteer, where those who are earning lower incomes cannot afford the time. Basic income could take the edge off anxiety and stress. It is a way to 'social inclusion,' enabling some people to actually become more involved in schools, neighbourhoods, community who otherwise would never be able to. Basic income can also have a positive impact on other unpaid work, for example internships. Very few people at any stage in life can afford to work for free. The last thing we want to see is employers taking advantage of basic income as a means to cheap/free labour or as a subsidy to decent living wages. People don't ask their plumbers or accountants or lawyers to work for free, but people expect musicians, writers, artists, students, etc., to provide their labour/work which they desire for little or nothing."

– Session Participant

7

Social insurance programs are inadequate and do not cover all people. Nor do employer-provided benefits provide the security or protection for which they were established.

➔ Sick pay/leave is another benefit that most people do not receive. Basic income provides workers with a modicum of stability or security in their workplaces. In terms of benefits, depending on

employers to provide extended benefits to workers doesn't make sense in an era in which great inequality exists between employers. Small employers with tight profit margins will never be able to deliver the same benefits as large multinational corporations.

➔ Employment Insurance is a deeply flawed and outdated program. Although it used to cover as many as 80 percent of workers in Canada, it now includes only 30 to 40 percent. It is no longer helping people who need it. EI, CPP, and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) are paid for via payroll taxes, not government revenues, meaning those outside the labour force are not supported by these programs.

- ➔ How basic income will work and interact with other social programs is a significant policy issue calling for exploration and clarification. For example, in terms of the CPP and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), more CPP means less GIS and therefore a person may end up being worse off. Many of our current social support programs no longer provide the security or protection for which they were established. We need both a basic income program and key government-funded social and health services working in harmony.



Programs to assist people with disabilities are highly ineffective. They do not cover all people, leaving too many people vulnerable and forced to live in destitution.

➔ Research has shown that approximately half of people of working age with disabilities are not in paid work.¹¹ Workers with disabilities face more barriers than do those without disabilities. They have to deal with the psychological impact of a system that doesn't trust them well and that prevents workers from taking risks. People with disabilities often become destitute (selling or disposing of their assets, savings, possessions, etc.). Many workers with disabilities seldom demand enforcement of their rights in the workplace because they're too worried about how the employer will react. Basic income can play an important role in ensuring those rights are recognized and upheld. Advocates for people with disabilities are also fighting for separation of income supports and employment supports no longer provide the security or protection for which they were established. We need both a basic income program and key government-funded social and health services working in harmony.

"Basic income can provide a level playing field for 'reasonable accommodation.' All workers should have the right to be accommodated but there is a power imbalance, and therefore, basic income is needed. There should be a national strategy on disabilities with separate income benefits from other programs."¹²

– Session Participant living with a disability

¹¹ Martin Turcotte, Persons with Disabilities and Employment, 2014. Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 75-006-X.

¹² José Luis Rey Pérez, 'Basic Income and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities', The Age of Human Rights Journal, no. 12 (13 June 2019): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.17561/tahrj.n12.1>.

9

We have an immediate environmental crisis that must be addressed. Unchecked economic growth to supposedly create jobs will only make things environmentally worse. Basic income allows people to make more environmentally conscious choices and movement toward a steady state economy.

➔ The green case for basic income has been underemphasized, even among basic income supporters. Leaving a habitable planet to our children means that we need a complete shift in our macroeconomic ideas and policies. We need to shift immediately away from resource-intensive jobs and unnecessary consumption. We must slow down the economy overall and shrink economic activities that are causing environmental crises such as climate change. Basic income can allow people to make better choices with regard to a greener world and selection of goods and services. Having more income allows people to make more environmentally conscious choices. There is also an urgent need for people to be doing the work of environmental mitigation, clean-up, and preparing for climate change fallout. Basic income could assist in building a workforce able to participate in this work. The nature of work has changed and will continue to change. Because of the global climate crisis, the public conversation needs to focus on what paid and unpaid work means today and what it should look like tomorrow in a greener world.



BASIC INCOME AS AN ALTERNATIVE

1

Separating work from income security is critical to allow people the ability to pursue other opportunities beyond work and to improve their quality of life.

- ➔ Basic income can separate a person from “the job” (and paid work in general) as a sole source of income. Work is a package of things – we need to begin to cut the ties between the job and the package of social and psychological benefits that can be derived from meaningful work. In other words, we need to de-couple the benefits of socially necessary and personally fulfilling work from the need to secure an income to survive. Basic income provides the income stream necessary for human flourishing and healthy living. Many people are unsure of their own purpose or what they are here to do – basic income can help people find themselves, empower them to take new paths to a better quality of life.
- ➔ Basic income is revolutionary because it allows people to separate themselves off from having to hold a specific job as the only means of securing an income for survival. It is not just about replacing work, but rather providing more options and opportunities. A basic income would also give citizens the freedom “not” to be employed — making it possible for anyone (at any point in life) to go back to school, to retrain for a new occupation, or to open a business. Basic income also has the potential of advancing women’s freedom. A basic income would allow people more easily to refuse to enter or to be able to leave employment relationships that violate individual self-governance or that involve unsafe, unhealthy, or demeaning conditions — essentially providing “the weakest with bargaining power.”

- ➔ In social assistance programs it is important to separate provision of social supports from provision of cash benefits. Removing caseworker control over cash benefits would build trust and allow social assistance recipients to develop supportive relationships with their caseworkers. Removing the compulsion of workfare and allowing social assistance recipients to make choices in taking up employment is also vital – when such choices are provided, the success rate in employment is much higher.
- ➔ In 2020 a report on Ontario’s truncated Basic Income pilot was done by the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction and McMaster University Labour Studies. This report used survey and interview research to show that the majority of those with jobs before the pilot reported that they continued to work while receiving basic income. Moreover, many reported moving to higher paying and more secure jobs.¹³

2

Immediacy — basic income will address people’s needs immediately and directly, and enable them to adapt rapidly to economic and social change with a guaranteed income floor upon which they can depend

➔ Many of the new jobs are in the service sector, where jobs are often low-paying. Technology creates disruption and technological change is happening fast in all sectors and areas of society. Compared to other social policies and income support programs, basic income has the speed necessary to protect people and provide a solution to these macro changes going on in our economy, workforce, and society at large.¹⁴ The Ontario Basic Income pilot revealed that participants receiving basic income payments were able to fast-track changes to their lives that brought about immediate positive results — healthier food choices, reduced mental health challenges, satisfying clothing needs, better rental accommodations and opportunities, enrolling in college or university, and/or starting a business of their own.

¹³ M. Ferdosi et al, Southern Ontario’s Basic Income Experience. McMaster University, March 2020. <https://labourstudies.mcmaster.ca/documents/southern-ontarios-basic-income-experience.pdf>

¹⁴ Leah Hamilton and James P. Mulvale, “Human Again”: The (Unrealized) Promise of Basic Income in Ontario’, *Journal of Poverty* 23, no. 7 (2019): 576–99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10875549.2019.1616242>.

3

Simplicity. Basic income does not have the complexity of the overwhelming layers of rules for social assistance, disability needs, or social insurance programs.

- ➔ Basic income is unconditional and does not require a person to be “managed” by a bureaucracy or have to “check-in” with caseworkers for every decision and every action taken to improve

daily life. In Ontario, prior to the severe cuts to social assistance in the 1990s, part of caseworkers’ focus was to help people to gain access to support services or employment services. During the time of Ontario’s Mike Harris government, social assistance rates were cut by 22 percent and “workfare” was introduced.¹⁵ With the province’s shift to workfare, the caseworkers’ role became more about policing people. This change had a big impact on caseworkers themselves – some of them enthusiastically embrace the rules, while others fight the rules to try to help the people they serve. Basic income would allow workers within the system to actually help people. Today, social assistance through OW and ODSP is bureaucratic, punitive, and stigmatizing for many people, with far too many complicated and contradictory rules.¹⁶

“The unconditionality of the basic income gave me empowerment, integrity, and an ability to take back my life – despite what the Ford government said when it shut down the pilot. Your health declines when you lose control of it. For the first time in my life, I had some security and some real options and opportunities to improve my life and my own well-being.”

– Session Participant

¹⁵ John Stapleton and Yvonne Yuan, ‘Ontario’s “Welfare Diet” in 2018’, Policy Options, 2 August 2018, <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/august-2018/ontarios-welfare-diet-2018/>.

¹⁶ Hamilton and Mulvale, “Human Again”.

4

Consistency. Basic income is something that people can count on that does not constantly change; it thus allows better planning and managing of expenses.

➔ The PEPSO studies revealed that extreme hardship is not just a question of poverty; rather, it is when people do not know what their income is going to be in six months, twelve months, or eighteen months.¹⁷ The existing system creates permanent insecurity and uncertainty. Basic income would help to remove those conditions.

5

For caseworkers, basic income represents an opportunity to become a true support for people instead of a punitive gatekeeper.

➔ There was a time when social workers (in the sphere of general welfare assistance and family benefits) were actually “caseworkers” – helping people with housing and employment training and other supports that they required. But now there is a lot of stress and anxiety on the social assistance front lines. A study of Ontario’s Workplace Safety and Insurance Board found high rates of burnout among staff.¹⁸ Anxiety levels are also very high for workers in the ODSP offices because there are too many cases, too much ongoing restructuring, and too many people not doing the jobs for which they were trained and educated. Many staff positions required clerical and administrative skills, not social work skills. Despite good wages and benefits, tension and anxiety are causing havoc in the ranks of OW/ODSP workers.

¹⁸ Donna Baines, ‘Women’s Occupational Health in Social Services: Stress, Violence, and Workload’, *Canadian Women Studies* 23, no. 3 (2004): 157–64.

- ➔ Caseworkers are trying to provide services and to connect people, to help clients to improve their lives; but instead they end up becoming engaged in the “criminalization of the poor.” The question, “What happens to the workers in the system who provide social services when basic income is launched?” is an important one in this ongoing conversation. OW/ODSP workers will not necessarily disappear; rather, they could be re-deployed as real caseworkers, helping people to resolve their problems, rather than policing them with regard to their eligibility and behaviour under current program rules.

6

Basic income can help to counter and stop the commodification of people.

➔ Many people are weighed down by our “sense of work,” by how much money a person makes and by wealth culture. People are no longer viewed as “citizens” but, rather, as customers, taxpayers, or clients. Workers, just like the goods and services they produce, have been commodified. Basic income has the power to turn this around and “de-commodify” workers and citizens. With our basic economic needs guaranteed, we can relate to each other as fellow citizens who value one another for who we are rather than for our income, spending, or wealth.

7

The Ontario basic income pilot shows evidence of improved health and well-being, improving access to healthier, more nutritious food -- leading to greater participation in society.

➔ People with low incomes have the worst health and mortality outcomes. Health providers need to think about a person’s income, their employment status, and related working conditions, and their access to nutritious food and secure housing.¹⁹

¹⁹ Kathryn Strother Ratcliff, *The Social Determinants of Health: Looking Upstream* (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2017).

Food insecurity has an extremely harmful impact on a person's health. One in five deaths globally is caused by food insecurity. A correlation exists between food insecurity and mental health and mood disorders.²⁰ Improvement of diet can improve health and life. Ontario basic income participants were able to greatly improve their access to healthy food and therefore improve their overall physical and mental health.²¹

- ➔ Having two or three jobs has a negative impact on a person's physical and mental health. Women, minorities, and racialized people have compounded and disproportionate rates of poor health — and many of these health impacts are intergenerational. Growing up in a poor family impairs cognitive growth, making it much harder to meet developmental milestones. The Ontario basic income pilot addressed the ways in which poverty is a social determinant of health: the regular income allowed people to eat better, and stress levels were reduced.
- ➔ One participant commented that basic income contributes to a healthier society indirectly by allowing parents to spend more time with their own children.

"There are inequities in the school system. Some schools in wealthier neighbourhoods with one stay-at-home parent have lots of parent volunteers whereas schools where both parents have to work one or more jobs don't get the same number of volunteers. Both the schools and the students suffer."

– Session Participant

²⁰ Nayantara Hattangadi et al., "Everybody I Know Is Always Hungry...But Nobody Asks Why": University Students, Food Insecurity and Mental Health', *Sustainability* 11, no. 6 (January 2019): 1571. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11061571>.

²¹ M. Ferdosi et al, *Southern Ontario's Basic Income Experience*. McMaster University, March 2020. <https://labourstudies.mcmaster.ca/documents/southern-ontarios-basic-income-experience.pdf>

8

Compared to social assistance programs, a basic income system avoids stigma and provides a greater sense of confidence.

➔ Stigma is attached to being on social assistance.²² Applicants and recipients are seen as unable to find good, meaningful work or to contribute to the community. The rhetoric is too often: “You ought to get a job or get help from your family!” When people do find work, any additional income is clawed back, which means

they are no further ahead. People who receive money from family members have their social assistance reduced. These people are told to get a job, despite good jobs being scarce or not available. A meta-analysis of basic income pilots showed marginal labour market detachment – basic income recipients who did not seek employment returned to post-secondary studies, cared for young children at home, or sought better living conditions.²³ The Ontario basic income pilot revealed a restoration of dignity, less stigmatization, and improved mental and general health among participants²⁴ — all of which are essential for participation in the workforce.

²² David Calnitsky, Basic Income: Social Assistance without the Stigma, Toronto Star, 30 May 2016, <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2016/05/30/basic-income-social-assistance-without-the-stigma.html>.

²³ R. Gilbert et al. Would a basic income guarantee reduce the motivation to work? An analysis of labor responses in 16 trial programs. Basic Income Studies 13.2 (2018). [doi:10.1515/bis-2018-0011]

²⁴ Basic Income Canada Network. Signposts to Success: Report of a BICN Survey of Ontario Basic Income Recipients (2019). https://assets.nationbuilder.com/bicn/pages/42/attachments/original/1551664357/BICN_-_Signposts_to_Success.pdf

LIMITS OR CONDITIONS ON BASIC INCOME

1

Even with a basic income system in place there is still a continuing need for robust social programs, unionization, minimum and living wages, and protective employment standards – basic income is not a silver bullet.

➔ Many on the political right who support basic income also favour eliminating or watering down government social services and protections.

But a key message around implementing a basic income program must be the need to maintain publicly funded social and health services – and in fact to expand and improve them in areas such as prescription drugs, home care, social housing, and early child development and care.

2

There is a need to ensure that in a transition to basic income, no one is left worse off than they are in already established income support programs. We must ensure that supports bundled into current programs for some (e.g., dental care, eyeglasses, supports for persons with disabilities) are maintained and improved.

➔ In addition to basic income, we need to dramatically invest in our social support programs (e.g., housing, rent subsidies, extended health services), and make unionization easier across the economy. While a small number of basic income advocates suggest that basic income is the “silver bullet” -- or that technology is taking all the jobs and basic income is the simple answer – the realities are more complex. A basic income must be paired with continued and enhanced government-provided services including education and training, comprehensive health care (including mental health, prescription drugs, dental, vision), childcare, and housing. A well-developed welfare state needs comprehensive public services built upon a strong income security foundation. Otherwise people will remain in need, and inequality, marginalization, and social exclusion will persist despite the provision of a basic income.

3

There is a need to address immigration policy so that migrant workers are not used and abused by employers as a work-around workforce.

➔ The migrant workers program, which was revamped and expanded by the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien, has resulted in employers failing to hire Canadian workers. Instead they exploit migrant workers with low wages and no benefits and have tight control over the people who arrive to take these jobs. What impact would basic income have on these workers? Do they end up with the bad and marginal jobs that nobody else wants to do? Don Drummond's report on Ontario's public spending noted that 28.8 percent of recent immigrants in Ontario lived in poverty five years after arrival, and 19.1 percent continued to live in poverty after ten years.²⁵



²⁵ Don Drummond, *Public Services for Ontarians: A Path to Sustainability and Excellence*. Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2012).

CONCLUSION

Basic income alone is not a panacea for all that ails the workplace and worsens social well-being. But basic income can have positive and significant socio-economic impacts on workers and households and local economies. It is an important tool for placing human well-being above all else – and for revaluing work, both paid and unpaid, and increasing the power of workers. Combined with specific labour and employment law reforms, and the inclusion of key universal social and health programs, basic income can eliminate workplace discrimination, inequality, and the resulting poverty that so many Canadian workers experience every day. Basic income can help detach individuals from complete “market, wage-labour dependence” for their basic subsistence. It can recognize the value and contribution of non-paid work, community service, academic studies, artistic activities, and personal development. It can establish a socio-economic floor beneath which no Canadians will fall.

We have an abundance of substantiated data about basic income and its significant and positive impact on the overall health and well-being of individuals and families, our neighbourhoods and communities, and our economy and society at large. These facts and figures will help us to build and solidify support for a national basic income program that would be a vital component in our quest to eliminate poverty and lessen income inequality in Canada.

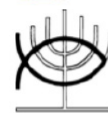
Work, the workplace, and the workforce have changed significantly in recent decades. Work for pay in the labour market was portrayed in the 20th century as a guarantee of economic security and financial stability for all. This promise is clearly unfulfilled in the 21st century. It is time for new thinking about the nature of work and new approaches to ensure income security for all.

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