



## ***The path forward for a fairer future***

### **RE: The case for basic income by and for youth in Canada**

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The [Basic Income Canada Youth Network \(BICYN\)](#) is a national group of engaged young people (under 35) in Canada who want to see the federal government adopt a guaranteed basic income. We work closely with other basic income and anti-poverty groups in achieving this goal, both in Canada and internationally.

#### **In short:**

In the view of BICYN, **the Government of Canada can and should implement an income-tested basic income guarantee set at a livable amount** to address income insecurity for all working-age adults - including young people - in Canada. Young people are looking to this government to make bold political moves to invest in our futures.

Throughout the course of history, youth have been at the forefront of social change in this country. Today is no different. Young people in Canada are calling on the federal government to address income inequality and implement more progressive and generous income supports. **For young people in Canada, basic income represents a glimmer of hope in a social and political context marked by uncertainty, volatility, and fear for our futures.** Implementing a basic income would be the difference for many young people between surviving and thriving. Beyond meaningfully addressing poverty and income insecurity in the short-term, implementing a basic income would leave a political legacy for this government and create a stronger foundation for future generations, while aligning with the [top priorities of Liberal party members](#). We applaud this government's commitment to addressing poverty, including introducing the Canada Disability Benefit Act, as we have [written elsewhere](#), a basic income is a natural next step to expanding income security programs to include everyone in Canada.

**Our recommendation:** The federal government implement a permanent, livable, basic income guarantee, in line with ongoing policy priorities of the Liberal Party of Canada membership and caucus. More specifically, BICYN recommends:

- That Budget 2024 includes renewed commitments to ending poverty in Canada and prioritizes the development of a basic income guarantee as a key measure towards this goal.

- That the federal government meaningfully engage with their provincial and territorial counterparts on this issue. In a [letter signed by all provincial party leaders](#), PEI legislators have recently reconfirmed their commitment to implementing a guaranteed basic income in their province with federal support. The federal government should take steps to engage with PEI on this topic, recognizing that the proposal represents a key opportunity to advance equity-informed, innovative, and evidence-based policy in Canada.
- That the federal government initiate and encourage conversations about basic income with cabinet members and other government leaders.

## Our key arguments

1. Young people in Canada support basic income.
2. Young people in Canada need basic income.
3. Basic income is a bold political move that supports and is supported by other social movements and sectors.

## The basic income we want

“Basic income” refers to an umbrella policy with a range of possibilities in terms of design and implementation. BICYN advocates for a basic income that embraces the following principles:

- **An income "floor":** Rather than a social safety “net” with holes and gaps, a basic income should provide a floor of income support for people in Canada who need it, raising people to a level below which they cannot fall.
- **Income-tested:** Basic income should be income-tested and available to those whose incomes fall beneath a certain threshold. In other words, a basic income should be universally accessible, but not universally distributed. Rates should be structured progressively based on other earned income; the benefit should be designed to ensure that recipients are never worse-off by earning income by other means like work.
- **Unconditional:** Basic income should be provided unconditionally to everyone who needs it between the ages of 18 and 64, regardless of where in Canada someone lives, their work status, or whether they meet behavioural conditions. A commitment to unconditionality also means that basic income should be afforded to people who have been historically and systematically excluded from income support programs (e.g., because of incarceration and/or institutionalization).
- **Complementary:** Beyond income, people require accessible and equitable healthcare, childcare, and housing to thrive. Rather than an “either or” situation, basic income should complement robust social services, including those that have yet to be introduced (this government's commitment to advancing broader access to childcare and pharmacare represent two examples of progressive social policy that would pair well with cash-based assistance).
- **Sufficient and dignified:** Our vision of a basic income is based on the dignity, autonomy, and the worth of each person. Rates of any basic income should be sufficient for recipients to pay for the necessities of life, participate meaningfully in their communities, and live with dignity.

- **Implemented collaboratively:** The introduction of a basic income should move forward in partnership and collaboration across Indigenous, subnational, and federal governments. Meaningful consultation with diverse rights holders can help facilitate inclusive and effective design, implementation, and outcomes, as well as ensure that no one is left behind.

## 1. Young people in Canada support a basic income.

Increasingly, young people across the country are voicing their support for a basic income. Public opinion research demonstrates this as well. As a youth-led, grassroots, national organization, we know that young people are ready and calling for a basic income as part of Canada's plan for a more equitable future.

- **Youth-led and youth-serving organizations across the country have added their voices to the call for basic income.** This includes the Canadian Federation of Students, representing more than 500,000 members across 64 students' unions, as well as YWCA Canada, the Ontario Council for International Cooperation's Youth Policy-Makers Hub, the Canadian Council of Young Feminists, the Canadian Coalition for Global Health Research – Students and Young Professionals Network, Canadian Council for Refugees Youth Network, Choices for Youth, Climate Justice Ottawa, Youth Climate Lab, and more.
- **Public opinion research** by Angus Reid in June 2020 found generally-high levels of support for a basic income among Canadians. Notably, 78% of Liberal and 84% of NDP voters in the last election, respectively, support a basic income. Youth are especially in favour: support is highest among 18-34 year olds. Given that high-priority issues for youth include things like rising cost of living, unpredictable economic conditions, and income inequality and poverty (Coletto & Kishchuk, 2019), **basic income stands to be a make-or-break policy for young voters in an upcoming election.**
- Basic income has also been identified as a priority by Young Liberals. [In 2021](#), the **Young Liberals of Canada advanced basic income as a policy priority at the annual Liberal Party convention, and this was identified as a high priority policy.**

## 2. Young people in Canada need a basic income.

In short, a basic income would provide stability for young people to plan for and invest in their futures with less fear and uncertainty than we currently face. Youth in this country are powerful, intelligent, and resilient. Many of us will live through not one, but two economic crises before turning 25. We deserve to be heard in conversations where decisions that will drastically affect our lives are made.

- **Basic income would provide a sense of stability and security to young people who have faced a high degree of volatility in their lifetimes, which has been exacerbated by multiple public health crises in this country.** [A recent study](#) found that children and adolescents in food insecure households in Canada had a 74-per-cent higher prevalence of mental or substance use disorder compared to children and adolescents in food secure situations.

- **Basic income would allow learners to enter and continue to pursue higher education with less financial stress.** Young people in Canada face higher rates of student debt than previous generations. About 60% of Canadian post-secondary students are concerned about their ability to repay their student loans, while 70% of new jobs in Canada require post-secondary education (Gitnux, 2023).
- **Basic income challenges exploitative working conditions, breaking the link between income security and the labour market.** Even before the pandemic, young people in Canada were struggling to find permanent, full-time work (Martin & Lewchuk, 2018), were concentrated in precarious or low-paid jobs (Canadian Union of Public Employees, 2018), all while struggling to balance work, volunteering, caring, and other roles.

### 3. Basic income is a bold political move that supports and is supported by other social movements and sectors.

Across the country, individuals and groups from a diversity of social movements and sectors have endorsed basic income as part of a more just and equitable future for our country. These include, but are not limited to:

- **Health:** Canadian Medical Association, Canadian Public Health Association, Canadian Association of Social Workers, Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada – which includes Canadian Cancer Society, Canadian Nurses Association, Diabetes Canada, Dietitians of Canada, Heart & Stroke, Kidney Foundation of Canada, and YMCA Canada.
- **Indigenous groups and activists:** Call for Justice 4.5 of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls calls on governments to “establish a guaranteed livable income for all Canadians, including Indigenous Peoples, to meet all their social and economic needs” (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019, p. 182). Other groups and activists who support basic income include: Aboriginal Women’s Action Network, Southern Chiefs’ Organization, Ka Ni Kanichihk, and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.
- **Gender equity:** In 2021, more than 3,600 organizations and individuals from across the country signed on to a national [Statement on Basic Income: A Case for Women](#). Signatories to date include the Canadian Women’s Foundation, the Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF), the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, the Canadian Women’s Chamber of Commerce, the Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses, and Women’s College Hospital. That same year, [the Standing Committee on the Status of Women](#) recommended: “that the Government of Canada, with the goal of eliminating income insecurity and financially empowering women, consider replacing existing emergency benefits with a permanent universal basic income program.”
- **Environmental justice:** LeadNow, Climate Justice Ottawa, Manitoba Youth for Climate Action, Youth Climate Lab.
- **Labour movement:** Workers United Canada Council, United Steelworkers, IATSE

- Canada.
- **Disability justice:** Disability Justice Network of Ontario, North Saskatchewan Independent Living Centre, Disability Action Hall.
- **Food security:** Food Banks Canada, Food Secure Canada, and Community Food Centres Canada.

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