



Basic Income:  
An investment in humanity

## Description

# A logic argument for a permanent dividend that would be paid to every Canadian adult

By Cymry Gomery

What if I told you that the Canadian government, through a simple new policy, could reduce poverty, increase employment, reduce the incidence of crime, address structural racism, help drug users heal from their addictions, lower prison populations, and improve the lives of children? These are all benefits of **Basic Income (UBI)**.



One of the images from photographer Jessie Golem's photo essay, [Humans of Basic Income](#)

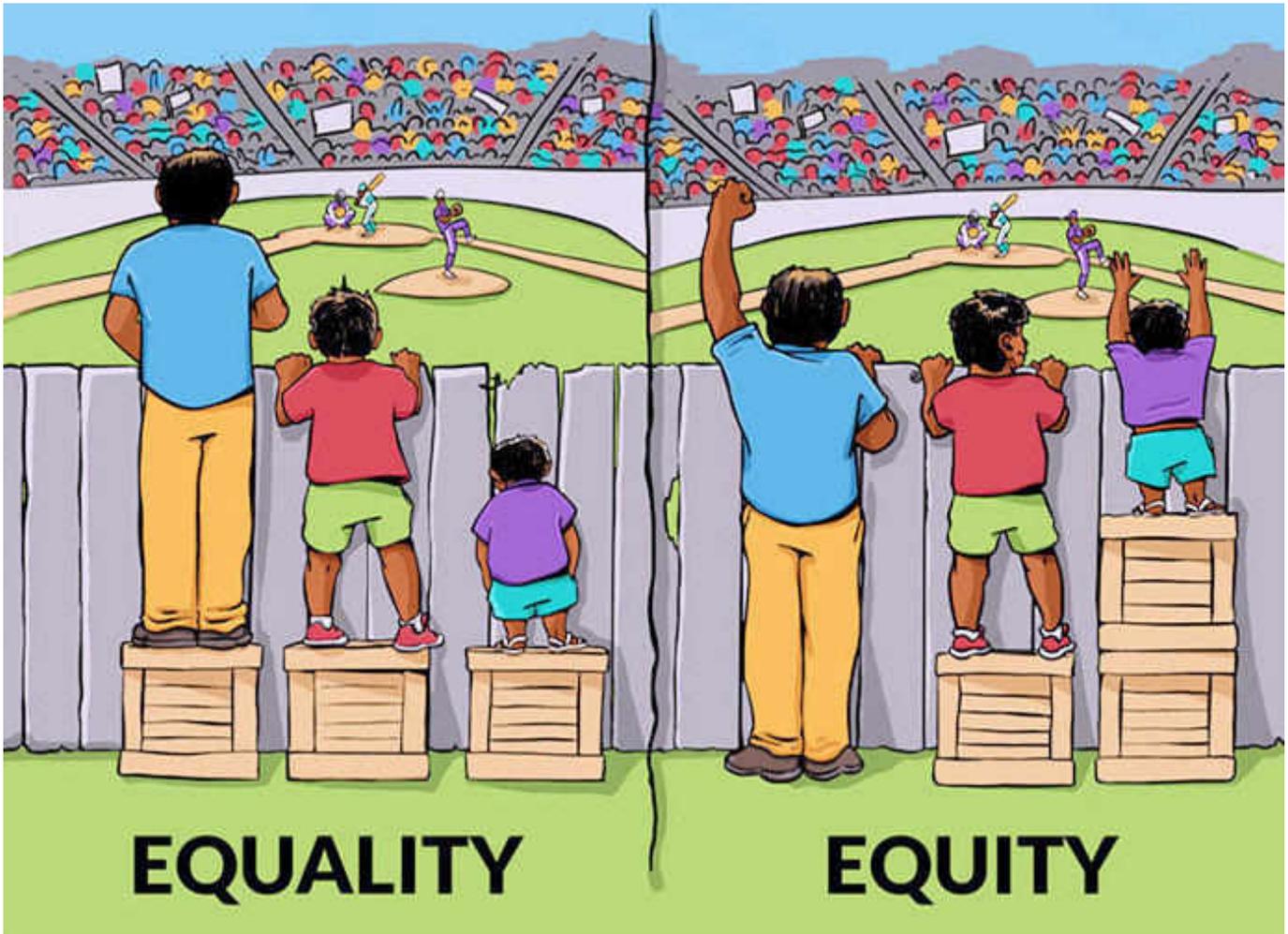
## What basic income is

Basic income is a permanent dividend that would be paid to every Canadian adult. To achieve its goal whereby every Canadian adult has a monthly income of at least \$2,000 from all sources, those who work would get UBI as a supplement, whereas the unemployed would get UBI as a guaranteed income. Thus, for example:

- A person with a monthly salary of over \$2000 would get the minimum UBI payment of \$500
- A person with no income and no other government supports would receive UBI of \$2000 per month;
- An entrepreneur who already earns, say, \$800 a month would receive a stipend of \$1200;
- A couple with individual incomes of \$1000 per month, respectively, would each receive a stipend of \$500 for a total household income of \$3000.

Basic Income is a solution to a changing world that includes artificial intelligence, the “gig economy,” and globalization. UBI would give part-time workers and in fact, every citizen, more time for family, art, exercise, and culture, to name a few.

Basic income is not a handout. It is a question of fairness.



## Studies dispel myths about UBI

**Evelyn Forget**, a University of Manitoba professor, researcher and author, cites **UBI studies** that have produced some counterintuitive results. For example, a study of 105,000 people in 16 basic income trials in the last 50 years found [participants worked more, not less](#); in Alaska, basic income increased part-time work by 17%, with no drop in full-time work. Participants' health improved, they invested in education and were able to save; family violence declined.

## UBI would help those left out of our current system

Currently, Canada has employment insurance, but this benefits only those who have lost a job... Even though we have Old Age Security, one has to wait 60 years to qualify... Welfare is available only to those who meet certain qualifications. Our current patchwork system jives with the MarketWorld mentality of reciprocity, in which society only supports those who have "paid their dues." What about Canadians who don't yet have a job, like adolescents transitioning out of foster care, someone recently released from prison, someone newly arrived in Canada, or someone going through a divorce or loss of a spouse? These people have no recourse.



Golem's photos tell a tale of hopes raised and then dashed when the Ontario pilot project was cancelled

**Senator Kim Pate**, who has worked with people on the margins of society, such as institutionalized women<sup>1</sup> and the intellectually disabled, states, "No one can make ends meet on social assistance. The government is willing to spend \$200,000 a month to go after welfare fraud, and between \$200,000 and \$500,000 to house women in the prison system, yet we don't invest in them when they get out." According to Senator Pate, every person in Canada could be housed, clothed and fed with the money that is instead being spent criminalizing them.

Since we are talking about justice for all of society, what better way to address inequities than by closing loopholes that allow some to profit immorally, and giving that recovered money to those who are traditionally denied justice?

## Where would the money come from?

First, it is important to note that UBI would not require austerity measures. Funding could come from a wealth tax, higher taxes on corporations, and from measures to address tax evasion in the form of tax havens, something that has long been on the table (or rather, under the table). Since we are talking about justice for all of society, what better way to address inequities than by closing loopholes that allow some to profit immorally, and giving that recovered money to those who are traditionally denied justice?

**Healthcare savings** are also a consideration since poor health is a corollary of poverty. Once UBI is in place, it would generate revenues in terms of income taxes from those who were able to find work thanks to this head start.



## Canada would be the first

There are currently no countries in the world with basic income, even though [it has been tried in many places](#). (The **Alaska Permanent Fund**, which ensures that every resident of that state gets a fixed income from oil revenues, is one of the closest examples of UBI in place today.) Perhaps the reason for the global foot-dragging can be found by examining Canada's own experiment with UBI, in Ontario.

## Ontario pilot project

Former **Premier Kathleen Wynne**'s government launched a [basic income pilot project](#) in Hamilton, Thunder Bay, and Lindsay, Ontario in April 2017, with 4000 participants. The project was supposed to span three years but was [cancelled after just one year](#) when Conservative premier Doug Ford came into power.

However, during its brief duration, the project spawned many stories of hope. **Basic Income Canada Network advisory council (BICN)** member **Chandra Pasma** tells the story of one pilot project participant who had been on disability for 30 years, who went into remission. Sadly, and perhaps not coincidentally, another participant, a disabled man who had blossomed during the program, died shortly after the project was cancelled. Such anecdotes suggest that it is not merely money at play here; the underlying social message that all lives are valued surely had an impact.

So why was the Ontario project cancelled? It could be because the very concept of basic income challenges some of the deepest tenets of our Capitalist system; the idea that there has always been poverty and that we should accept it, like death and taxes. A UBI program, in acknowledging and seeking to address the structural inequities of our country, would be revolutionary – and so a threat to some business elites. Perhaps that explains why the Liberals and Conservatives recently [voted against a wealth tax](#).

'If the Canadian government had implemented UBI before 2020, the Canadian people would have been protected when the pandemic struck... Our society would not be experiencing the level of economic shock and despair that is currently playing out.'

## Models have already been developed

In 2020, a team from BICN produced a report, [Basic Income: Some Policy Options for Canada](#), which provides three model implementations of Basic Income for Canada. So the government has only to choose one.

If the Canadian government had implemented UBI before 2020, the Canadian people would have been protected when the pandemic struck. There would be no need for the **Canadian Emergency Revenue Benefit (CERB)**. Our society would not be experiencing the level of economic shock and despair that is currently playing out.

UBI is system change, like electoral reform, and as such, it challenges the very foundations of our society. It would take something extraordinary to get the Canadian government to try it... something that would make us all stop short and ask some existential questions... like a pandemic, perhaps.

Please sign [MP Leah Gazan's petition](#) supporting motion M-46 for Basic Income.

Visit photographer Jessie Golem's photo essay, [Humans of Basic Income](#)

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1. A population that is 44% Indigenous and 10% Black.

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Feature image: montage of images from Jessie Golem's photo essay, [Humans of Basic Income](#)

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**Cymry Gomery** is a Montrealer who is passionate about social justice, animal rights, climate change, and the rights of nature. In 1997, she began to question why the same two federal parties had been alternating in power for her entire life. She accordingly joined Fair Vote Canada and Mouvement Démocratie Nouvelle, and looks forward to the day when Canada and Québec have proportional representation governments.



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