

Basic Income Consultations:

What We Heard

March 2017





BASIC INCOME CONSULTATIONS: WHAT WE HEARD

We're launching a pilot project to see if giving people a basic income can be a simpler and more effective way to provide security, support people living on low incomes and reduce poverty.

This report outlines what we heard from **November 3, 2016 to January 31, 2017**, when we invited Ontarians to share their feedback on the design of a Basic Income Pilot.

We are also continuing to work with Indigenous communities to tailor a culturally appropriate approach that reflects their advice and perspectives.

We are still in the process of designing the Pilot, which will be launched in Spring 2017.

MINISTERS' MESSAGE

Testing new ways to provide income support and fight poverty

We believe that every family deserves the dignity and security of a life free from poverty. That's why our government is proud to launch a Basic Income Pilot to test a different approach to providing people with income support.

Using the **Discussion Paper** written by the Honourable Hugh Segal as a starting point, consultations were held across the province, giving people a voice in determining what the Pilot could look like. Through this report, we are pleased to present what we heard on how best to design and implement the Basic Income Pilot to address the needs of low income individuals. We continue to work with Indigenous partners to ensure that the unique perspectives of their communities are heard.

Building on this feedback, we will introduce a Basic Income Pilot that will test an evidence-based model on how to improve health, employment and housing outcomes for the people of Ontario.

The Pilot will complement our **Poverty Reduction Strategy**. It will also help inform the work of our **Income Security Reform Working Group**, which has been tasked to build a multi-year plan to reform social assistance within the broader income security landscape.

As we design the Pilot, we will ensure that no one will be worse off because they have chosen to participate. This means that participants can always exit the Pilot if their circumstances change. Evaluation results from the Pilot will be made public to help inform the future income security system.

Basic income is a simplified approach to income support. Beyond a Basic Income, we know that people in Ontario will need other important services like the Ontario Child Benefit. We will ensure that participants have the information they need to decide if the Basic Income Pilot might be right for them based on their unique circumstances.

The energy and enthusiasm that stakeholders, advocates, people with lived experience and other interested individuals brought to the consultations was truly remarkable. As this report demonstrates, the consultation process has provided us with much to consider as we design a model for a Basic Income Pilot in Ontario.

We would like to thank everyone who participated in this important consultation. We are carefully considering all of the feedback we have received as we work to introduce a Basic Income Pilot and are eager to begin the Pilot later this year.



Chris Ballard

Minister Responsible for the
Poverty Reduction Strategy,
Minister of Housing

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Ballard".



Dr. Helena Jaczek

Minister of Community
and Social Services

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Helena Jaczek".

BACKGROUND

Every day, individuals and families receive income supports through **Ontario Works**, the **Ontario Disability Support Program**, the **Ontario Child Benefit**, and various other tax credits and benefits. While we have heard that we must continue to improve these programs through rate increases and other improvements and through targeted measures in the **Poverty Reduction Strategy**, we believe more could be done.

We want to test a new approach to improving the health and well-being of people living on low incomes. That's why in June 2016, we asked the Honourable Hugh Segal for advice on how to design and implement a Basic Income Pilot in Ontario. Mr. Segal submitted a discussion paper, **Finding a Better Way: A Basic Income Pilot for Ontario**, which we used as the starting point for our consultations with Ontarians.



WHAT IS BASIC INCOME

A **basic income** is generally seen as a payment from the **government** to a person or family to ensure they receive a minimum income level.

Different than social assistance, a basic income can be:

- given to anyone who meets the income eligibility criterion
- generally simpler to administer

A basic income can be implemented in a number of ways, including:

- **giving the same amount of money to everyone**
- **topping up** the incomes of people who earn less than a certain amount
- setting up a system where people who earn less than a certain amount get a payment from the government, instead of paying taxes



HOW THE CONSULTATIONS WORKED

We sought input from people across the province, including people with lived experience with poverty, municipalities, experts, academics, and the general public. We are also working with Indigenous partners to engage with First Nations, urban Indigenous, Métis and Inuit communities.

Broad and inclusive consultations

Our consultations were broad and inclusive, gathering input from a cross-section of people in Ontario. To ensure that everyone had an opportunity to express their opinions on how a Basic Income Pilot should work, we used four complementary approaches to gather feedback:

1. In-person public meetings
2. An online survey for the public
3. An online survey aimed at people who either work in or are interested in the sector
4. Written submissions from the public, community and related groups

Between November 3, 2016 and January 31, 2017:



The public input we received through the consultations is crucial to designing and implementing an effective Basic Income Pilot.

CONSULTATION FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

Many individuals who participated in the consultations support the idea of a Basic Income Pilot. In general, they want the Pilot to:

1. Include a representative sample of participants

Many agreed that Pilot participants be restricted to residents of the Pilot sites aged 18-64. Among those who participated in in-person consultations, there was also strong agreement that the Pilot should include people who are currently receiving social assistance (Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program).

2. Have representative locations

Consultation participants supported selecting locations that represent a cross section of social, economic and demographic profiles that are reflective of the entire province. A majority agreed that the Pilot should include urban, rural and northern locations, with varying populations and poverty rates that are representative of the diverse circumstances experienced across the province.

3. Lift people out of poverty

There was strong agreement that the Basic Income amount should be set at a level that will lift participants out of poverty. There was a divide over how much that level should be, with some participants recommending a level of 75 per cent of the Low Income Measure (LIM). Others thought that it should be set at 100 per cent of the LIM. The LIM is a common income-based definition of poverty, equal to half of the median household income in Ontario, and adjusted for the number of household members. For 2016, 75 per cent of the LIM would be \$16,989 for a single person or \$24,027 for a couple.

4. Run efficiently

Participants were asked if they agreed with piloting the Negative Income Tax (NIT) model, also described as a “refundable tax credit,” that would guarantee a certain level of income. There was solid support for this model, with many respondents noting that it would be a simple, fair system that would encourage employment. While the Discussion Paper specifically recommends against using a Universal Basic Income (or “demogrant”) where all adults in the Pilot would receive the same payment regardless of income level, some people in the in-person consultations suggested using this method.

5. Measure specific outcomes

Participants were primarily focused on the following four outcomes that they believe would be most directly impacted by a basic income: **health, housing, food and work behaviour.**

WHAT WE HEARD

The following is a summary of the thousands of comments, suggestions, and opinions we received during the consultations. Participants provided us with creative and innovative answers to many of the questions that arose during the consultations. As in any public consultation, there were also varying opinions on how we should proceed. This summary is a snapshot of the entire consultation process, organized under the following headings:

Determining eligibility for the Pilot



Selecting locations for the Pilot



Determining the Basic Income benefit amount



Delivering the Pilot results



Evaluating the Basic Income Pilot



DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY FOR THE PILOT



Consultation participants were asked to suggest specific groups of people for the Pilot, and to consider what factors the Pilot should use to determine their eligibility.

Eligibility

Many agreed that Pilot participants should be residents of the Pilot sites who are aged 18-64. There was strong agreement that people currently receiving social assistance (Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program) should also be eligible for the Pilot, which was also suggested in the Discussion Paper. Some also wanted to include seniors in the Pilot, and others suggested including youth aged 16 and 17 who are living independently. Many of those consulted suggested that the criteria for Pilot eligibility should be broad.

Diversity

Participants felt that it was important to ensure a diverse sample of the population, taking into account some groups that are more likely to benefit from a basic income. Some specific groups suggested were:

- those engaged in precarious work
- people trying to enter the workforce (e.g., new graduates and immigrants)
- people receiving Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program benefits
- undocumented residents
- single parents
- First Nations people and communities
- newcomers
- refugees
- homeless people

Income determination

Participants were divided in their opinions on whether to use either individual income or family income to determine eligibility for the Pilot. Participants pointed out advantages for both criteria.

People who preferred using **family income** for eligibility noted:

- family income is the most accurate and fair measure of household resources
- income disparity within families means one member could qualify while others wouldn't
- family cost of living is shared
- household expenses are higher for families than individuals
- family members support each other financially

People who preferred using **individual income** for eligibility noted:

- it provides individuals with more autonomy and choice
- it may reduce financial pressure to remain in abusive relationships
- unemployed members of a family could receive their own basic income directly

SELECTING LOCATIONS FOR THE PILOT



Participants in the consultations were asked to suggest criteria and a process for selecting Pilot locations. They considered whether the Pilot should be launched in multiple communities simultaneously, or phased-in over time.

Variety of locations

Many agreed that the Pilot should include urban, rural, and northern locations, with varying populations and poverty rates. Participants strongly supported selecting locations that reflect the diverse social and economic contexts of Ontario's communities.

Locations with demonstrated need

Another area of broad agreement was to select areas that demonstrate the greatest need, or where there are disproportionately high poverty rates. Participants offered specific suggestions to help select relevant communities that would provide meaningful Pilot data. These included:

- areas most in need, based on regional poverty rates
- areas with low employment rates
- First Nation communities, including urban, rural and isolated locations
- the 10 regions in Ontario with the most people receiving social assistance benefits
- areas with poor health statistics and limited access to housing
- locations with significant economic disparities
- communities with a distressed manufacturing sector

Locations willing to participate

Most participants emphasized the importance of selecting communities that are willing and even enthusiastic to participate in the Pilot. To accomplish this, they suggested:

- identification of suitable communities
- no requirement that communities must apply to be considered
- a simple application process for interested communities
- a random selection process drawing from a pool of interested/suitable communities

Some participants suggested that if someone moves from a designated Pilot area, they should not lose access to Basic Income.

Diverse populations

Many groups underlined the importance of defining diversity in the context of specific communities. For example, diversity in an urban community would likely differ significantly from diversity in a rural setting.

Most groups expressed a preference for locations that reflect various aspects of the province's diversity. These include:

- communities with high levels of ethno-cultural diversity
- First Nations communities

Simultaneous start up

Many participants preferred a simultaneous launch of the Pilot in all locations across Ontario. Advantages cited include:

- different groups can be compared in real time
- the ability to provide data sooner
- being able to offer help to participants sooner
- more reliable and comparable data
- limiting the amount of variation in the study arising from differing timelines

Some suggested a staggered approach to implementing the Pilot, citing the opportunity to work out operational challenges. Possible benefits of a staggered approach include taking the time necessary to slowly roll out the Pilot in a thoughtful and practical way.

DETERMINING THE BASIC INCOME BENEFIT AMOUNT



Consultation participants considered how much a basic income should be and what that amount should do - should it raise incomes significantly, or provide a modest level of stability? They were also asked to suggest what other services and supports should accompany a basic income, and what elements of existing programs (e.g., Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program) should be replaced by the basic income during the Pilot.

The **Discussion Paper** recommended using the Low Income Measure (LIM), a common income-based definition of poverty, to set benefits rates. The LIM is equal to half of the median household in Ontario, and adjusted for the number of people in the household.

Lifting people out of poverty

There was agreement that the Basic Income amount should be set at a level that will lift participants out of poverty, with mixed opinion on how much that level should be, ranging between 75 per cent and 100 per cent of LIM. There was a recognition that the amount should consider the additional needs of families with children. There was a general agreement with the Discussion Paper recommendation that people with disabilities receive an additional \$500 per month, in addition to the 75 per cent or 100 per cent LIM amount.

Table: Potential Basic Income amounts

Household size	75 per cent LIM 2016 estimate	100 per cent LIM 2016 estimate
Single person	\$16,989	\$22,653
Couple	\$24,027	\$32,036

Working with existing programs

There was widespread concern about the effect that a basic income could have on those who are currently receiving Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program benefits. In virtually every consultation, participants agreed with the principle outlined in the Discussion Paper that “no individual will be made worse off during or after the Pilot.”

There was also general agreement that current features of existing benefits (dental, drugs, assistance devices, medical transportation, vision care, etc.) for those on social assistance should be maintained with the Basic Income Pilot.

A small number of participants suggested that the Basic Income should replace other benefit programs, such as Employment Insurance, Old Age Security, Canada Pension Plan, etc.

Many participants also commented that social assistance rates should be raised immediately in order to better meet Ontarians' needs.

Considering cost of living

Many consultation participants referred to the cost of living in communities across Ontario, where it can be higher in some urban and northern areas of the province. For example, the amount required to cover living expenses and basic needs such as food and housing differs according to where one lives. Respondents agreed this should be considered when determining how much a basic income should be.

Additional services and benefits

Many consultation participants offered suggestions for additional services that should be available for participants in the Basic Income Pilot. These suggested services include:

- employment services
- financial literacy training
- income tax support services
- food/nutrition education
- Internet access
- life skills training
- medical benefits (including dental and drug)
- mental health and addictions support

DELIVERING THE PILOT RESULTS



Ontarians were asked if they agreed with the Negative Income Tax (NIT) model, as recommended in the Discussion Paper. Also defined as a refundable tax credit, this model would guarantee a certain level of income regardless of circumstances.

The Discussion Paper specifically recommends against using a Universal Basic Income (or demogrant) where all adults in the Pilot would receive the same payment, subject to income tax. The paper notes that other jurisdictions are testing this method, and that financial costs would be prohibitive. Despite this, many people in the in-person consultations suggested using this method, acknowledging the higher costs.

Consultation participants also offered opinions on how the Basic Income Pilot should respond to changes in a person's income.

Choosing a benefit delivery model

In the NIT model, benefits are provided to those whose income falls below a minimum level. Benefits are adjusted at an established rate, as earned income increases or decreases. Some respondents preferred this delivery model. The preference for NIT rose significantly in step with their understanding of how it would work in practice.

Many respondents who agreed with the use of the NIT model noted that it would be a simple, fair system that would encourage employment. Most preferred to have some type of income tracking (such as the existing income tax system) in place.

Suggestions to enhance delivery through an NIT include:

- additional supports to help participants navigate the income tax system
- setting income levels annually, and allowing for more frequent payments (e.g. monthly or bi-weekly)

Many participants also stated that the Basic Income Pilot should be flexible to reflect changes in a person's circumstances, for example, job loss, divorce or changes in income.

This would ensure that the Basic Income continues to provide stability and income security if a new challenge arises.

For those who favoured a Universal Basic Income model (equal payments to all in the Pilot regardless of income level), its simplicity was seen as a great strength, while its costs were often cited as prohibitive.

Delivering payments

Most participants who favoured the NIT model also felt that delivery using the income tax system would work best. Opinions on how recipients should receive their payments were quite consistent. Various payment systems were suggested, including direct deposit, email money transfers, and reloadable payment cards. Some noted that these payment methods would also ensure privacy and reduce bureaucracy.

EVALUATING THE BASIC INCOME PILOT



Evaluation of the Pilot depends on reliable, secure data that reflect measurable outcomes. Consultation participants ranked the importance of 10 outcomes that could be affected by the Pilot. These outcomes range from health and education to food insecurity and social inclusion. The participants also offered their views on how to protect the privacy of Pilot participants, while ensuring that the data generated by the Pilot is useful for planning purposes and future programs.

Measuring outcomes: health and housing top the list

The Discussion Paper suggested 10 measurable outcomes to be assessed in order of importance by consultation participants. They are:

- health
- life and career choices
- education outcomes
- work behaviour, job search and employment status
- community level impacts where the Pilot operates in local areas
- direct administrative costs or savings
- changes in food security status
- perceptions of citizenship and inclusion for participants
- impact on mobility and housing arrangements
- impact on participants' relationship existing social programs

There was a general agreement that four of the 10 outcomes listed in the Discussion Paper are particularly important: **health, housing, food**, and **work behaviour**. Many participants noted that improvements in these

four areas would improve outcomes in most of the other suggested areas. Others declined to rank them, stating that all the outcomes were important.

Participants also offered their own ideas for indicators to assist in measuring progress toward the 10 outcomes. These included:

- food bank usage
- health care wait times
- enrolment in post-secondary and trade programs
- volunteer activity
- homelessness rates
- crime rates
- domestic violence rates
- community safety
- quality of life (e.g. family time, arts)
- mental health
- rates of addiction
- high school and postsecondary graduation rates
- visits to hospital and doctors' offices
- community involvement
- ability to cope and provide for family

Protecting participant privacy

Many participants expressed a strong preference for strict protection of the Pilot recipients' privacy and confidentiality. Another common thread was a belief that recipients could (and would) share their personal information, as long as it could not be traced back to them. Many participants said that if they were in the Basic Income Pilot, they would share their anonymous personal information if they knew how it would be used. Some did not agree that any data should be shared.

With those privacy caveats in place, a strong majority understood and accepted the need to share anonymized research findings with the public. Many also

believed that Pilot participants should have access to the results before they are released to the public.

Encouraging participation

Consultation participants offered numerous creative ideas to encourage participation in the Pilot. They include:

- communicating through the media
- helping people to understand how their information will be used
- simplifying the application process
- providing success stories
- being transparent about the purpose of the Pilot as the basis for further research
- emphasizing that it could reduce government spending in the future
- explaining that there will be support provided to participants after the Pilot ends
- discussing the benefits of participation in the Pilot
- ensuring service providers receive education about the Pilot

COMMENTS BEYOND BASIC INCOME

Activists from the “Raise the Rates” campaign attended some of the

consultations and read a motion from the floor calling for an immediate increase in social assistance rates.

SUBMISSIONS TO THE BASIC INCOME PILOT CONSULTATIONS

The ministry received submissions from a wide variety of groups and organizations, along with hundreds of submissions from individuals.

Municipalities

Regional Municipality of York

Regional Municipality of Durham - staff

Regional Municipality of Durham - community

Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (on behalf of ALPHA-OPHA and Public Health Ontario)

Simcoe County

City of Kawartha Lakes

Region of Peel - staff

Region of Peel - community

London's Child and Youth Network and City of London, Social Services - Lived Experience

London's Child and Youth Network and City of London, Social Services - staff

Association of Municipalities of Ontario

Halton Region

Ontario Municipal Social Services Association

City of Niagara Falls

United Counties of Leeds and Grenville

Toronto Public Health

City of St. Thomas

Community Organizations

Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario

Basic Income Earth Network, Belgium

Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and Empowerment Council

Campaign 2000/Family Service Toronto

Canadian Diabetes Association

Canadian Mental Health Association

CNIB

Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres of Ottawa

Dietitians of Canada

Down Syndrome Association of Simcoe County

Group Ottawa for Basic Income Guarantee

Guelph and Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination

Halton Poverty Roundtable

Hamilton Community Food Centre

Income and Community Development Pillar, Thunder Bay and District

Poverty Reduction Strategy

Income Security Advocacy Centre

Land O'Lakes Community Services

Louis Even Institute of Social Justice

March of Dimes Canada

Middlesex-London Health Unit

Niagara Poverty Reduction Network

North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit

North Lanark Community Health Centre

Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses (OAITH)

Survivor Action Committee

Ontario Council, Canadian Federation of University Women

Ontario Economic Development Society

Ontario Native Welfare Administrator's Association
Ontario Network of Employment Skills Training Projects
Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association
Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health
Ottawa Poverty Reduction Network
Peel Poverty Action Group
Poverty Reduction Network Sarnia-Lambton
Registered Nurses Association of Ontario
Rideau Community Health Services
Sault Ste. Marie and Algoma District
Scarborough Civic Action Network (SCAN)
Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit
Social Planning Council of York Region
St. Catharines Road to Empowerment
St. Clare's Multifaith Housing Society
Toronto-Danforth Provincial Liberal Association
United Way Peterborough
University of Toronto Public Health & Preventive Medicine
Resident Physicians
West Neighborhood House
West Neighborhood House, Informal Economy project
Yonge Street Mission
YWCA Toronto

Labour

Ontario Federation of Labour
Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU)
Canadian Union of Public Employees, Ontario

Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 79

Basic Income Groups

Voice of the Poor Committee

Basic Income Waterloo Region

Hamilton Basic Income

Basic Income Peterborough Network

Kingston Action Group for a Basic Income

Political Organizations

Green Party of Ontario

Green Party of Canada

Ministry of Community and Social Services and Ontario Works Offices

ODSP office, Scarborough

ODSP Client Advisory Group

ODSP office, Brantford

ODSP office, Simcoe

ODSP, Special Services At Home (SSAH), and
Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities (ACSD)

Lanark County Ontario Works

ODSP office, 47 Sheppard Ave. E, Toronto

ODSP office, Sudbury

Ontario Works, City of Kingston

RELATED RESOURCES

[Basic Income Pilot home page](#)

If you would like more
information on Basic Income
in Ontario, visit our website:
ontario.ca/basicincome

