



Basic Income Canada Network
Réseau canadien pour le revenu garanti

A Brief to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA)
regarding Bill C-22

An Act to reduce poverty and to support the financial security of persons with disabilities by establishing the Canada disability benefit and making a consequential amendment to the Income Tax Act

By
**Basic Income Canada Network/
Réseau canadien pour le revenu garanti**

The Basic Income Canada Network (BICN) unequivocally supports greater financial security for people with disabilities and a lasting reduction in the extent and depth of poverty now suffered. We are not disability experts, although people with disabilities are part of our wide network. It is people with lived expertise of disability and their organizations whose voices count when designing programs that address disability needs that are beyond the basics that we all need. Working for income security for everyone is BICN's mandate.

In Bill C-22, disability needs are not directly addressed. Disability is a category to determine who will be among the 'classes' of people who are included in improved income security. The regulations will determine what differences among the included 'classes' will matter. As the Bill's preamble states, Canada has policies that include people 65 and over and children under 18 that have successfully improved security and reduced poverty. Bill C-22 can bring more people along that path, many who desperately need it.

Bill C-22 can be seen in two ways, however:

- i) The first is its role in filling an important gap in income security for 18-64 year olds, specifically those who meet conditions related to disability. It will no doubt help. How much will depend on its adequacy and other design decisions. It can also pave the way to fill the gaps for other 18-64 year olds.
- ii) The other view is that this selective eligibility may further embed the deserving/undeserving paradigm that perpetuates discrimination, making it much harder for those left behind to struggle for their right to a decent and dignified life. Disability advocates have told us they want Bill C-22 to be a stepping stone to a more universally accessible, less conditional income support system.

There are several ways in which a basic income guarantee for all would benefit people with disabilities:

- **A basic income would provide more options and greater wellbeing for caregivers and care recipients.** In meetings of disability organizations, BICN heard the concerns of friends and relatives of children and adults with disabilities. These caregivers provide essential care and other supports and their lives are impacted

too. Many struggle to provide care for their loved ones and earn enough to keep themselves afloat, a struggle that a basic income would help address.

- **A basic income honours the diversity and dignity of all community members.** There are people with disabilities who could benefit from greater income security but for various reasons do not want to be identified as disabled. An unconditional benefit allows them the freedom and dignity to manage their lives as they see fit.
- **A basic income can prevent disability and lessen its impacts by enabling people to better weather ups and downs that we can all face¹.** Insecurity, inequality, poverty and social assistance systems are a pipeline to disability. The route to disability can be sudden but it is often a long and preventable process. Insecurity is growing as employment is becoming more precarious, straining physical and mental health and relationships. Inequality for some means a life of dealing with racism and gendered violence, for example, or for immigrants and refugees, a traumatic displacement. Poverty adds another layer, with employment that is very demanding but brings little reward. Health suffers. The indignities of food bank visits, a poverty of time, and police interactions make coping harder. The last resort, social assistance, is a special kind of horror of gross inadequacy, stigma, loss of control, and penalties for trying to get ahead. Many people who end up on provincial disability support programs do so after time spent in the regular assistance stream. This is extraordinarily costly in human and economic terms.
- **In basic income-like programs in this country (seniors and children's benefits) and in pilots around the world, there is a pattern of improved health².** In a survey BICN conducted during the Ontario pilot³, recipients noted remarkable improvements in health and reductions in medications needed to manage their conditions. People whose employment and enjoyment of life were limited were able to become more active again. There are individual, community, social, political and economic benefits to including rather than excluding people in income security policy. It is simpler and more effective.

BICN has modelled a basic income that reduces poverty and improves financial security for 18-64 year olds. The details are in Option 1 in ***Basic Income, Some Policy Options for Canada***.⁴ It has a benefit level that is equivalent to the \$2000/month payment that was delivered through the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) during the pandemic. It reflects a reasonable level of adequacy for basic needs. Unlike CERB, our benefit amount is reduced as other income increases—and very gradually, at 40%. This low reduction rate could be especially important to make sure employment pays for people with disabilities who are able to participate in employment, but not on a full-year, full-time basis.

¹ Lustig, D. C., & Strauser, D. R. (2007). Causal relationships between poverty and disability. *Rehabilitation counseling bulletin*, 50(4), 194-202

² Hasdell, R. (2020) What we know about Universal Basic Income: A cross-synthesis of reviews. Stanford, CA: Basic Income Lab

³ <https://basicincomecanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/BICN-Signposts-to-Success.pdf>

⁴ https://basicincomecanada.org/policy_options/

The following excerpt from that report⁵ explains the approach we took regarding disability.

Support for persons living with disabilities: *Although many recent proposals include a supplement for persons living with disabilities, we opted not to on the grounds that every individual deserves to have a basic level of income security, whether or not they have a disability that meets the criteria outlined in a public policy. Programs providing higher benefits to persons living with disabilities always end up, however inadvertently, privileging specific types of disabilities that are easier to demonstrate to a doctor, or favouring those with better access to medical professionals. We believe that instead of forcing anyone to jump through bureaucratic hoops to prove they deserve support, everyone should get an income that is high enough to provide basic security and dignity. We recognize that many people living with disabilities do have extra costs associated with their disability. However, we believe that those costs are better met through a program that directly addresses actual costs, which can vary significantly, rather than through a basic income. This is not something we model here, but it is something that needs to be taken into account in designing any basic income program.*

Please note that we were modelling income benefits and that in other parts of the report we stress that a basic income works in synergy with public services, and this includes disability supports and services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) That the Canada Disability Benefit be designed in a manner consistent with a basic income guarantee model so that it provides a secure and adequate economic basis for people with disabilities, and that it supports and does not hinder the capacity for a more inclusive, universally accessible basic income guarantee in the future.
- 2) That the benefit amount meet a standard of adequacy that would bring recipients to, or above, the poverty level.
- 3) That the income guarantee use a low benefit reduction rate on other income, in particular to ensure that employment is well-rewarded.
- 4) That eligibility be minimally conditional in terms of its definition of disability and have no conditions related to employment, training or treatment.
- 5) That the Canada Disability Benefit should focus on basic needs, be universal among people with disabilities, and must be coupled with other benefits, services and supports to meet additional costs of disability and additional needs related to disability.

BICN is a registered non-profit, non-partisan organization. For more information please visit our website at <https://basicincomecanada.org/>.

⁵ ibid. pg. 10/11