Foundations for Action
Basic Income Guarantee for the NWT Report
Community Summary

March 28th, 2023
By Alternatives North
for the Government of the Northwest Territories
Foundations for Action

Basic Income Guarantee for the NWT Report

This report and summary reports are a product of Alternative North's Basic Income Guarantee for the NWT Project, Phase 1, November 2022 - March 2023. Published March 28, 2023 under Creative Commons License.

Report Authors/Project Team:
Mitchell Beer, Michel Haener, Lois Little, Andrew McCann, Janet Patterfung, Sheila Regehr

Report Printing: Kopykat North, Yellowknife, Northwest Territories

Project Liaison: Suzette Montreuil, Alternatives North

Alternatives North

Alternatives North is a Northwest Territories social justice coalition based in Yellowknife. Members include churches, labour unions, environmental organizations, women and family advocates, anti-poverty groups, and individuals with an interest in our work. https://alternativesnorth.ca

This report is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution, NonCommercial, ShareAlike, 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/

You are free to: Share, copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format; adapt, remix and build upon the material. Attribution: You must give appropriate credit, link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. NonCommercial: You may not use the material for commercial purposes. ShareAlike: If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original. No additional restrictions: You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Government of the Northwest Territories Anti-Poverty Fund, the Public Service Alliance of Canada Social Justice Fund, the United Church of Canada, and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Mackenzie-Fort Smith for their generous financial support for this project. Thank you also to the Basic Income Canada Network for their leadership and labour. This project would not be possible without the countless advocates, researchers and those with lived experience who have built the case for a basic income guarantee over many years in the North, across Canada, and beyond. Most of the credit goes to you, but all errors herein are our own.

We dedicate this report to the young people of the NWT, with the aim that they grow up in a beautiful, sustainable land, free of poverty, full of hope and opportunities for all.
COMMUNITY SUMMARY

At a time when many people in the Northwest Territories (NWT) are struggling, a basic income guarantee could lift almost everyone out of poverty. But this policy goes beyond poverty reduction with its transformational potential. A basic income guarantee can allow people to go back to school, retrain for a new job, or start their own business. It can allow others to care for aging or sick loved ones, volunteer in their community, find appropriate housing, recover from stress or trauma, and put healthy food on the table. This report emphasizes the importance of broad consultation and detailed modelling. Alternatives North is calling for the following steps to move forward with design and delivery:

1. Public awareness, education and dialogue should be supported by NWT government and non-government organizations and must include diverse voices from across the territory.

2. Basic income guarantee design options should be studied and modelled to show their impacts on people in the NWT and to weigh benefits and costs.

3. The Government of the NWT (GNWT) should take concrete steps towards the implementation of a basic income guarantee through pilots or program development.

4. The federal government should be encouraged to invest in a basic income guarantee.

5. The GNWT should be encouraged to move programs in a direction consistent with a basic income guarantee.

6. The relationship between a basic income guarantee and Indigenous self-determination should be fully explored.

What is a Basic Income Guarantee?

A basic income is a regular government payment to people - enough that everyone can meet basic needs, live with dignity, and participate in society, with no requirement to meet certain conditions, including paid work.

In the basic income guarantee model the income is there when you need it. This is how seniors’ and children’s benefits work. Not everyone gets a cheque for the same amount. With an income guarantee, if you have a great job with a living wage or more, you get a smaller payment, or maybe none. If you’re struggling and need more help, your payment is bigger, up to an income floor that you can’t fall below.
A Design that Makes Sense for the NWT

A review of published literature, conversations with experts inside and outside the GNWT, and a virtual public forum in mid-February showed that a basic income guarantee has to be built around the realities of life and public policy in the NWT. The system must be flexible, fair, effective, and actively include a diverse range of Indigenous voices and values. There should be lots of opportunities for people to find out how a basic income guarantee works before the program begins.

A basic income guarantee can make life better for people in the NWT as long as:

- The guaranteed benefit is enough to help recipients meet their basic expenses and live with dignity - to take part in the life of the community, pursue retraining or higher education if they want to, and take part in traditional activities
- The benefit level reflects the higher cost of living in the North, and differences in costs among NWT regions and communities
- Benefits are set up to support people who move in and out of paid jobs, and who live with multiple adults in a single household
- The system doesn't limit or complicate access to housing and disability benefits, mental health supports, job creation programs, or other social programs
- The income calculation doesn't claw back specific entitlements that reflect treaty and other types of reparations

Specific design details must factor in a list of important, often fairly technical details, including:

- Indigenous leadership and values
- How long a recipient has lived in the NWT
- The pros and cons of monthly versus biweekly payments
- Payment options for people who can't receive direct deposits, or don't have access to computers or the internet

Delivering a Basic Income Guarantee in the NWT

Once the program is designed, there are a few different ways the GNWT can start delivering it - on its own or in cooperation with the federal government, as a pilot project, or as a full program. One way or another, the next steps are to listen to people and communities, design the details of the program, and start generating direct experience. These steps will tell us how best to deliver a basic income guarantee that meets the unique needs of people in the NWT.

Please read the full Foundations for Action: Basic Income Guarantee for the NWT Report to learn more about this transformational opportunity for our territory and its diverse peoples.