

May 28, 2015

The Honourable Pierre Poilievre  
Minister of Employment and  
Social Development  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

The Honourable Kellie K. Leitch  
Minister of Labour  
Ministry of Labour  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

The Honourable Rona Ambrose  
Minister of Health  
Ministry of Health  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON  
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The Honourable Kevin Daniel Flynn  
Minister of Labour  
Ministry of Labour  
14<sup>th</sup> Floor  
400 University Avenue  
Toronto, ON M7A 1T7

The Honourable Eric Hoskins  
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care  
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care  
10<sup>th</sup> Floor, Hepburn Block  
80 Grosvenor Street  
Toronto, ON M7A 2C4

The Honourable Tracy MacCharles  
Minister of Children and Youth Services  
Ministry of Children and Youth Services  
14<sup>th</sup> Floor  
56 Wellesley Street West  
Toronto, ON M5S 2S3

The Honourable Deborah Matthews  
Minister Responsible for the  
Poverty Reduction Strategy  
Room 4320, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Whitney Block  
99 Wellesley Street West  
Toronto, ON M7A 1W3

Dear Minister Poilievre, Minister Leitch, Minister Ambrose, Minister Flynn, Minister Hoskins, Minister MacCharles, and Minister Matthews:

**Re: Public health support for a basic income guarantee**

On behalf of the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit's Board of Health, I am writing today to express our strong support for joint federal-provincial (Ontario) consideration for and investigation into a basic income guarantee for Ontarians and all Canadians.

Several reports in recent years have described the extent of poverty and growing income inequality in Ontario and Canada.<sup>1,2</sup> From a public health perspective, there is a strong literature base demonstrating the relationship between both low absolute income, and the extent of income inequality in a society, and a range of adverse health and social outcomes. This includes morbidity and/or mortality from chronic and infectious disease, mental illness, and infant mortality, amongst others.<sup>3</sup> Given that 56 000 people (or more than 11% of the population) in Simcoe and Muskoka live in low income situations based on the after-tax low-income (2011 National Household Survey, Statistics Canada), the avoidable burden of disease from low income and income inequalities is substantial.

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In response to these key social and public health challenges, a growing number of individuals and organizations in the health, economics, social, and political sectors have proposed the introduction of a basic income guarantee for all Canadians, also known as guaranteed annual income. A basic income guarantee ensures everyone an income sufficient to meet basic needs and live with dignity, regardless of work status. It can be achieved through a range of policy approaches.

Basic income is a concept that has been examined and debated for decades, including through pilot projects in the United States, Canada, and other countries more recently.<sup>4,5</sup> As you may be aware, Mincome, in particular, was an encouraging pilot project of basic income for working age adults conducted jointly by the Government of Manitoba and the Government of Canada in the 1970s, which demonstrated several improved health and educational outcomes.<sup>4</sup> Basic income also resembles income guarantees currently provided in Canada for seniors and children, which have contributed to health and social improvements in those age groups.<sup>6,7</sup>

In addition to providing an effective policy response to poverty and inequality, a basic income guarantee would be a key societal support in the face of rising precarious employment in Canada. Given the trend towards fewer opportunities for secure, permanent jobs, providing living wages and benefits, a basic income guarantee could help buffer the effects of precarious employment by providing a form of 'disaster insurance' that protects people from slipping into poverty during challenging times.<sup>6</sup>

There has been recent support for a basic income guarantee from the Canadian Medical Association, the Alberta Public Health Association, and the Canadian Association of Social Workers. The Canadian Public Health Association is also examining the issue. Beyond the health and social sectors, a non-governmental organization by the name of Basic Income Canada Network is now dedicated to achieving a basic income guarantee in Canada, and several citizen groups are forming across Ontario and Canada in support of this issue.

Advocating for improved income security policies is supportive of the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit's strategic direction on the Determinants of Health, which requires the health unit to 'Address the factors that create inequities in overall health and improve the quality of life for populations at risk of poor health outcomes'.

We urge you to undertake a joint federal-provincial investigation into a basic income guarantee in order to address the extensive health inequities in Canada, which are both highly concerning and largely preventable.

Sincerely,

Barry Ward  
Chair, Board of Health

- c. The Right Honourable Steven Harper, Prime Minister of Canada  
The Honourable Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario  
Dr. David Mowat, Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Linda Stewart, Association of Local Public Health Agencies  
Pegeen Walsh, Ontario Public Health Association  
Ontario Boards of Health  
Simcoe Muskoka Members of Parliament  
Simcoe Muskoka Members of Provincial Parliament  
North Simcoe Muskoka and Central Local Health Integration Network  
Gary McNamara, President, Association of Municipalities Ontario  
Brock Carlton, Chief Executive Officer, Federation of Canadian Municipalities  
Simcoe Muskoka Municipalities

## References

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