

Basic Income Background Report

Highlights

The *Basic Income Background Report* examines the feasibility, design, and potential impacts of implementing a Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) in the Yukon. Against the backdrop of high living costs, socio-economic disparities, and limitations in existing social support systems, this report brings together national and international research, Yukon-specific poverty data, and community perspectives to assess the opportunities and challenges of introducing a BIG program.

Context

Poverty rates in the Yukon remain higher than the national average, with 12.9% of residents—approximately 5,200 people—living in poverty in 2022. Lone parents, single individuals, Indigenous peoples, and rural communities are disproportionately affected. Income gaps drive food and housing insecurity, poor health outcomes, and high public costs in health care, justice, and social services. Pandemic benefits temporarily reduced poverty, showing that income supports can work when adequately resourced.

What Basic Income Offers

Basic income provides an unconditional cash transfer, designed to guarantee a minimum standard of living while preserving the incentive to work. Unlike social assistance, BIG minimizes bureaucracy, reduces stigma, and gives individuals agency over how they meet their needs. Global and Canadian pilot projects consistently show benefits including improved health, food and housing security, educational outcomes, and community engagement.

Yukon-Specific Insights

- **Community research** highlighted food, housing, and transportation as the most pressing expenses for Yukoners with low incomes.
- **First Nations consultations** underscored the importance of aligning BIG with self-governing principles, wraparound supports, and respect for Indigenous cultural and economic practices.
- **Focus groups with social assistance recipients** revealed widespread frustration with inadequate rates and undignified processes. Participants expressed hope that BIG could reduce stigma and provide stability, but also raised concerns about inadequate rates, clawbacks, and the need for mental health and substance use supports.

Potential Benefits

BIG could:

- Improve mental and physical health outcomes.
- Enhance housing and food security.
- Reduce reliance on emergency and justice systems, lowering public costs.
- Strengthen labour market participation and entrepreneurship.

Limitations and Considerations

BIG is not a silver bullet. It cannot resolve systemic issues such as housing shortages, the substance use crisis, or health care system strain on its own. The report emphasizes the need for BIG to operate alongside complementary investments in housing, health, and social supports.

Conclusion

A Basic Income Guarantee has the potential to significantly reduce poverty, improve wellbeing, and foster greater equity across the territory. However, its success would depend on thoughtful program design, collaboration with First Nations governments, integration with wraparound supports, and concurrent strategies to address systemic crises. More research and sustained consultation are needed to determine how BIG could be best adapted to Yukon's unique social, cultural, and economic context.

About the Basic Income Background Report

The *Basic Income Background Report* is the result of an exploratory research study funded by the Yukon Government and developed through the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition (YAPC). It was created in response to **Recommendation 5.7 of *Putting People First***, which called for the creation of a basic income pilot project in the territory.

This report provides the research foundation for exploring how a Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) could be designed and implemented in the Yukon. It draws on national and international evidence, Yukon-specific data, and the voices of community members and First Nations governments to highlight both opportunities and challenges.



Read the full report

