

## Tamarack March 12 Webinar follow-up questions

- *What about basic income for immigrant workers, whether it is temporary foreign workers program (especially for agriculture workers) or workers in tourist locations (e.g. Banff, Whistler)?*

Both of these questions, about immigration and Indigenous peoples, deal with issues that are beyond the scope of the modelling we were able to do for our policy options. The report explains in a section on limitations, for example, how the Statistics Canada data available to us does not include on-reserve populations or the territories.

But the questions are absolutely very important ones for governments designing a basic income to take into account. And that involves understanding and consulting with people in different situations. Deciding who is eligible—Canadian citizens? permanent residents? others?—is a central issue. The Ontario pilot, for example, determined that people had to have lived in their pilot site community for a certain length of time in order to enroll. SPSD/M includes permanent residents without distinguishing them from citizens, but not temporary residents. So our modeling includes people who have permanent resident status. Even with a fully mature basic income, there would likely remain a need for other types of measures to address transitional situations, like immigrants or refugees who are just arriving, or people who are here only temporarily.

*What have you heard from Inuit, First Nations, and Métis groups regarding the use of refundable tax benefits among these communities where tax filing can be low because of the legacy of colonialism?*

With regard to Indigenous perspectives, we do know and work with people who are very strong supporters. The concept of a basic income was actually included in some treaties but as with many other promises, not fulfilled. One landmark indication of the positive difference a basic income could make to individual lives and to the health of our country comes from the Report of the Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls; it calls on government to bring in a basic income for all.

- *In the modeling, do you deduct Pension or EI income as the same as earned income or 100% like current social assistance programs? Currently it quite literally does not pay to have contributed (worked) and have a severe disability. We are no better off financially than those that did not contribute.*

One of the principles that we adopted in developing the revenue side of our modeling came from the Carter Commission's recommendation to treat all income the same, regardless of source (or as Carter famously put it, "a buck is buck." Right now, income from work is more heavily taxed than income from investments. For someone who is working, EI is reduced by 50% for earners, but 100% for those on social assistance. This system has the effect of giving the wealthiest Canadians (those most likely to have income from investments) the lowest tax rates and the poorest Canadians the highest.

So for our modeling, on the revenue side, we reduced measures that treated different kinds of income differently (like eliminating the capital gains exemption) and on the benefit side, treating all forms of income equally in determining the reduction rate. This means that someone is not penalized for having worked. We also set the reduction rate for the benefit at 40% which tapers the basic income gradually so that people gain from being employed and do not see 100% of their earnings clawed back as they can be with social assistance programs.

- *Programs like ODSP give the same amount to all disabled people regardless of their individual cost. So when “Person A” has a psychiatric disability and her only added cost would be medication which is covered by the drug plan, while “Person B” has a physical disability and has to pay for things like her wheelchair and batteries plus adapted clothing, “Person B” may not have enough money to cover her disability costs without using her food money.*

Could disabled people have access to non-means-tested funds that would adequately cover their individual disability-related needs and that would be totally separate from their BI income? That would follow the principle of equity rather than 'equal' treatment

Absolutely. Our current disability programs don't do a good job of meeting the actual needs of people living with disabilities. They are a very blunt tool. For some people, giving everyone who qualifies the same benefit might work out well, because they have extra income that they can spend on other things. For others, it means that disability programs are not meeting their actual needs. Giving everyone a basic income that will help to address basic security and then addressing the specific needs of individuals with a separate program – one that addresses the actual costs of their disability – seems more equitable to me.

A separate program like this that was centered on actual expenses could also have a lower threshold for defining disability and make it easier for people to qualify. For instance, more than 6 million Canadians have a disability that limits their daily activities and nearly 2 million of them have a severe disability, but only 1.2 million Canadians are receiving the Disability Tax Credit, even though the DTC is a gateway to other federal disability programs. That means there's a lot of people with a diagnosed disability who are not receiving any help. We don't even know how many people have a disability but are not able to get a diagnosis. All of these people deserve to have income security. And they deserve to have help with the expenses associated with their disability.