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# P.E.I. basic income project a federal partnership worth supporting

We can keep playing whack-a-mole with our social support priorities, or we can move towards a data-driven study providing the information required to address growing poverty, food insecurity, health-care costs, and increasing income gaps.



Current poverty reduction policies focus on program-targeted supports, but the result is that these combined programs do not raise people out of poverty, writes Liberal MP Sean Casey.

**OPINION** | BY LIBERAL MP SEAN CASEY | March 12, 2026



Canada has been disrupted by many issues which have led to the need to prioritize the development of our economic infrastructure and create a more resilient society. Why can't this priority include reducing, or even eliminating, poverty? It need not be an either/or choice. We can do both.

Maintaining poverty is expensive. Current poverty-reduction policies focus on program-targeted supports, but the result is

that these combined programs do not raise people out of poverty. Evidence indicates this approach keeps people in poverty. This includes many 18-to-64-year-olds. The increase to GST payments is a good step. Studies indicate that ensuring that everyone has access to sufficient income support is an important part of strengthening economic resiliency.

For many years, the idea of a basic income has been discussed. Research has indicated that sufficient and reliable income has a substantial positive effect on the social determinants of health, as well as on the outcomes in many sectors, but creating a basic income form of income support for those most vulnerable (including many in the middle class) is complicated: social supports are the purview of federal, provincial, and territorial governments; there are questions as to how a basic income would affect other social support programs; and—as many have been told—it could be expensive. As well, misinformation about basic income is rampant.

With these questions in mind, a 20-person team—with the support and participation of the Prince Edward Island government—began work in 2020 to see if a model of a basic income could be created that not only addresses many concerns and questions, but could also come up with a socially and financially feasible proposal for how a basic income could be implemented. The result of this work is the 2023 report, *Proposing a Guaranteed Basic Income for P.E.I.*

Almost immediately after the final report came out, the federal and P.E.I. governments agreed to establish a working group to study the proposal. This team met in June 2024, but so far as we know, it hasn't met since. This is not entirely unexpected. Many of those involved with this work are wondering if our politicians understand what is being asked of them. No one is expecting that the federal and provincial governments jump into a permanent implementation of a basic income.

There are too many questions that need to first be addressed. Which is why the 'ask' being made of the federal government is laid out in steps:

Understand that the goal is for a five- to seven-year, full province, basic income demonstration project, with the control group in a different province—perhaps particular regions in New Brunswick or Nova Scotia.

Support the federal-provincial working group to study the report and bring the numbers up to current known data. Understand the net and gross costs, which are important and frequently misunderstood numbers.

If the results of the working group confirm not only the report's modelled outcomes, but also results in a better understanding of the potential impacts a basic income could have on lives and on our economy, then the goal would be for the federal and provincial governments to define the terms, aims, and process of a demonstration project in P.E.I., and come to a cost sharing understanding.

The P.E.I. project has outlined a very pragmatic method of moving forward. One federal politician who has overseen the development of numerous social policy initiatives described the P.E.I. proposal to me as “a policy maker's dream.” But the message does not seem to be hitting home. Perhaps because policy and political representatives are not fully grasping that a basic income could be an element in making our economy more resilient.

We can keep playing whack-a-mole with our social support priorities, or we can move towards a data-driven, empirical study which would provide the actual information required to address growing poverty, growing food insecurity, growing health-care costs, increasing income gap. and provide people with the ability to create more sustainable lives for themselves while more fully participating in our society and economy.

Poverty is a policy choice. Let's choose a different policy. Understand the P.E.I. proposal. Support this study. Find a solution that benefits all Canadians.

Sean Casey is the Liberal Member Parliament for Charlottetown, P.E.I.

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