

Basic income project needs your support

Waterloo Region Record · 30 Jul 2026 · CAROL STALKER CAROL STALKER IS A MEMBER OF COALITION CANADA BASIC INCOME AND BASIC INCOME WATERLOO REGION. SHE IS ALSO PROFESSOR EMERITUS, LYLE S. HALLMAN FACULTY OF SOCIAL WORK, AT WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY.

Readers may be aware of the opportunities Canada lost when provincial basic income pilot projects were cancelled before their results could be fully understood.

Today, the federal government has a chance to correct that failure by supporting a new demonstration project in Prince Edward Island. The need for action is urgent.

In 2018, the federal government committed to reducing poverty by 50 per cent by 2030. Yet last fall, the National Advisory Council on Poverty reported that poverty has been rising since 2021. The homelessness crisis and demand on food banks are visible reminders that too many Canadians are being left behind.

A distinguished group of current and former politicians, public servants, economists and community advocates has developed a detailed and practical proposal for a guaranteed basic income.

Their recommendation is straightforward: test the model through a demonstration project on Prince Edward Island. Support for the idea is broad. All four political parties on P.E.I. have expressed support for a GBI, and a federalprovincial working group has been established. What is needed now is the political will to move the project forward.

The proposed GBI would be a targeted, incometested cash benefit delivered through the tax system to adults in lowincome households. Funding would be shared by the federal and provincial governments.

One of the proposal's most innovative features is its approach to calculating costs. Previous GBI models have generally used the "nuclear family" as the unit of analysis, treating adult children who live with their parents as separate family units. The P.E.I. proposal uses the broader "census family" definition, which considers adult children living at home to be part of the same administrative family unless they have their own spouse, partner or children in the household.

This seemingly technical change has significant implications. By using the census family model, the estimated cost of the program falls by nearly 40 per cent while achieving the same reduction in poverty as models based on the nuclear family. In an era of fiscal restraint, this finding deserves careful attention.

The P.E.I. project provides a unique opportunity to generate rigorous, contemporary Canadian evidence about how governments can strengthen income security. While economists and

policy experts continue to debate the best way to repair gaps in Canada's social safety net, this demonstration would provide practical answers based on realworld experience.

Why should Ontarians — and Canadians in every province — care about a basic income project on Prince Edward Island?

Because this is how transformative social policy often begins in Canada. Saskatchewan pioneered public hospitalization insurance, laying the foundation for our universal healthcare system. Quebec demonstrated the effectiveness of affordable child care, helping pave the way for the national \$10aday childcare program. Successful innovations in one province frequently become models for the rest of the country.

For a relatively modest investment, the P.E.I. demonstration project would provide the evidence needed to determine what works, what does not, and how income security can be strengthened nationwide. The lessons learned would benefit not only Prince Edward Island, but all Canadians.

As governments consider major nationbuilding initiatives, they should remember that building a stronger country is not only about infrastructure and economic growth. It is also about ensuring that all Canadians have the security and opportunity to contribute to their communities and share in the country's prosperity.

We encourage readers to ask their member of Parliament and the prime minister to make the P.E.I. guaranteed basic income demonstration project happen. Investing in evidencebased solutions to income insecurity will help create healthier communities, stronger local economies, and a more resilient and inclusive Canada.