



Name of Policy: Universal Basic Income

Policy Adoption Date: *SLSC Annual General Meeting, Ottawa, ON, June 4, 2021.*

Mission and Mandate: St. Leonard's Society of Canada is a membership-based, charitable organization dedicated to community safety. The mission of SLSC is to promote a humane and informed justice policy and responsible leadership to foster safe communities. It:

- a. Endorses evidence-based approaches to criminal and social justice;
- b. Conducts research and develops policy;
- c. Supports its member affiliates; and
- d. Advances collaborative relationships and communication among individuals and organizations dedicated to social justice.

Purpose of SLSC Policies: Policies of SLSC are developed in collaboration with affiliate agencies, SLSC's Board of Directors and members, and are ratified at the Annual General Meeting with the express purposes of:

- Identifying criminal justice and related issues relevant to its membership;
- Reflecting SLSC organizational values and social justice goals;
- Articulating SLSC approaches, practices and standards to achieve these goals; and
- Ensuring the good governance of SLSC on matters of legal, administrative and organizational relevance.

Background:

St. Leonard's Society of Canada (SLSC) and its members recognize the persistent and overwhelming presence of poverty in Canada. Poverty is described as a condition in which a person is unable to meet a basic standard of living because of a lack of sufficient income to support basic needs, including food, housing, education, and healthcare.¹ Data suggests that the vast majority of people living in poverty are employed but are still unable to afford essential living costs, experiencing what is referred to as 'in-work poverty'.² As of 2020, no Canadian province or territory offers welfare or social assistance benefits that bring people above the poverty line. Although national poverty rates are generally declining, 3.5 million Canadians, including 560,000 children, are still living in poverty.³ The longstanding issue of poverty both intersects and amplifies colonialism, racism, and the disproportionate number of Indigenous Peoples victimized, criminalized, and incarcerated today.

Universal Basic Income (UBI), also referred to as a Guaranteed Liveable Income or Negative Income Tax, is a government funded service that provides the financial means necessary to lift people out of poverty,

¹ Senate of Canada (2020). [Guaranteed Liveable Income](#). *Debates of the Senate*, 151(11), 299-302

² Senate of Canada (2020).

Gibson, M., Hearty, W. & Craig, P. (2020). [The Public Health Effects of Interventions Similar to Basic Income: A Scoping View](#). *Lancet Public Health*.

³ Global News. (2019). [StatsCan looking to redefine the poverty line](#). *Global National*.

as well as prevent others from falling below the poverty threshold.⁴ Proponents of UBI suggest moving away from the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ ideology that underpins many other income support benefits, by broadening the eligibility criteria. Implementation of measures to provide a UBI serve to reduce the amount of social stigma suffered by low-wage and unemployed community members who require financial support. Researchers advise that a UBI be implemented as a supportive component to other social services and social safety nets that already exist in Canada.⁵ Although a basic income in the form of a regular payment (also known as a citizenship dividend) is most commonly advocated for, other favourable alternatives to UBI include:

- **Job Guarantee:** the federal government will ensure every Canadian has access to an employment opportunity, reducing rates of unemployment and job insecurity.
- **Universal Basic Services:** instead of providing direct payments, the government will ensure that every Canadian has equal and free access to a list of basic services, including childcare, healthcare, and education. Without the burden of payment for these services, people will have more funds to allocate to other needs.

Research emphasizes how each form of UBI addresses select challenges faced by many Canadians; yet experts agree that a combination of basic income, job guarantee, and universal basic services would be the most comprehensive strategy in the endeavour to eradicate poverty in Canada.⁶

In November 2018, the Government of Canada set a target to reduce poverty by 20% by 2020 and to subsequently halve the poverty rate by 2030.⁷ Findings by Statistics Canada show that the first interim target has been reached.⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic, however, brought a surge of unstable economic conditions that have disproportionately affected low-wage workers, minority communities, and other vulnerable segments of society, including people who are or have been involved with the criminal justice system. The government’s use of the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) as a quick measure to address the pandemic’s economic disruption demonstrates both the feasibility and public appeal of an initiative to provide financial stability for those in need. As a result, there has been a renewed push for UBI in Canada as a long-term replacement for the CERB, which will also help meet and/or exceed the 2030 poverty reduction target.

Issues/Scope:

Over the course of 50 years, the plan to administer a UBI or similar concept has been studied, debated, and piloted, creating a solid foundation for legislative development. There is much evidence to support the contention that unstable economic conditions are directly related to vulnerabilities of homelessness, increased crime rates, and more specifically, poverty-related crime.⁹ Although current statistics indicate that 11% of Canadians are living below the poverty line, this population disproportionately makes up 80%

⁴ Broadbent Institute. (2019). [Basic Income: an explainer by Guy Caron](#). *Press Progress*.

⁵ Broadbent Institute. (2019).

⁶ MacEwen et al. (2020). [Basic Income Guarantee: A Social Democratic Framework](#). *Broadbent Institute*.

⁷ Fraser Institute. (2020). [A Critical Assessment of Canada’s Official Poverty Line](#).

⁸ Government of Canada. (2019). [Canada Reaches Lowest Poverty Rate in History](#). *Employment and Social Development Canada*.

⁹ Senate of Canada (2020).

of those in prison.¹⁰ In 97% of cities across Canada, people earning minimum-wage with full-time employment can neither afford monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment, nor additional living expenses.¹¹ This matter has influenced the burden of unmet housing needs, causing 12.7% of Canadians to live in unaffordable and/or unsuitable housing based on family size and other essential needs.¹² Homelessness, unmet housing needs, and poverty-related crime are, therefore, three interrelated components of poverty that a UBI can address.

To address concerns related to the effective implementation of UBI alternatives, experts suggest that certain considerations must be addressed. In relation to job guarantees, safeguards are necessary to ensure the demand for employment does not result in an inflation of low-wage jobs that do not adequately support people's basic needs, leaving the issue of in-work poverty unresolved. Additionally, when implementing universal basic services, collaboration with provinces and territories will be required to ensure a consistent quality of care across the country.¹³

Most counter arguments are not reasons to oppose UBI; they are expressions of concern for the fiscal viability of such a widespread initiative. Even so, establishing a UBI would mean taking multiple steps toward social and criminal justice, while also increasing public safety at the national and local levels through reductions of poverty and inequality, homelessness, and incidents of poverty-related crime. By creating stable economic conditions that will support reductions in these areas, a UBI will likely result in less spending on the criminal justice system (e.g. police, courts, corrections). It will also allow for more funding to be allocated to the government's UBI budget, among other community-based services known to be effective in reducing poverty, inequality, and crime rates in Canada (e.g. affordable housing).

Having easy access to a UBI will be supplementary to tertiary crime prevention strategies, programs, and services, which are directed toward previously incarcerated individuals. A UBI is capable of improving integration processes for those leaving prison and/or being released from Community-based Residential Facilities (CBRFs) by assisting them in handling the employment and housing insecurities often associated with the stigmatizing impacts of a criminal record. For this reason, having access to financial support without conditional requirements will not only keep people above the poverty line, but it will also reduce and/or resolve many of the malleable facets that have led to criminality and repeat offending in the first place. A UBI, therefore, can be used as a combined measure of poverty and crime reduction, ensuring the safety and security of all persons in communities across Canada.

The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime has also taken note of the large role poverty plays in criminalization and victimization, highlighting the importance of addressing poverty as part of the criminal justice system's rehabilitative process.¹⁴ Research has indicated that the delivery of a UBI will support gender equity in terms of income levels, increasing the likelihood that women and/or men will flee from abusive households and violent partners.¹⁵ In addition, a UBI can also improve parental quality by alleviating financial uncertainty and making services associated with child-rearing more accessible (e.g.

¹⁰ Senate of Canada (2020).

¹¹ Senate of Canada (2020).

¹² Senate of Canada (2020).

¹³ Broadbent Institute. (2019).

¹⁴ Senate of Canada (2020).

¹⁵ Broadbent Institute. (2019).

childcare and extracurricular activities), especially in single parent homes.¹⁶ A UBI can, therefore, improve life outcomes for many disadvantaged people, while also decreasing crime rates.

The security and flexibility that a UBI offers will give recipients a stronger sense of agency and purpose within society, allowing them to meet basic needs and more freely participate in the community.¹⁷ The disparity between social groups is reduced, resulting in fewer instances of violence and higher rates of inclusion, cooperation, and respect.¹⁸ UBI can reduce the stigmatizing effects of a low-income, disability, or involvement with the criminal justice system, while also building a stronger community.

Resolutions:

Given the persistent and overwhelming presence of poverty in Canada and the extensive, evidence-based research regarding universal basic income in Canada, be it resolved that St. Leonard's Society of Canada:

- recognizes UBI as a 'first step' out of poverty, leading to a broad range of positive outcomes which include the reduction of social harm and its many negative impacts on a community;
- supports the immediate implementation of a universal basic income, based on research findings; and,
- affirms that all people living in Canada have the right to financial security.

Additional Information

SLSC Reports/Publications:

- St. Leonard's Society of Canada. (2018). [SLSC Policy on Crime Prevention](#).
- St. Leonard's Society of Canada. (2020). [SLSC Policy on the Impact of Criminal Records](#).

External Reports/Publications:

- Basic Income Canada Network. (2017). [Basic income primer series](#).
- Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis. (2020). [Potential economic impacts and reach of basic income programs in Canada](#).
- Employment and Social Development Canada. (2020). [Building understanding: The first report of the National Advisory Council on poverty](#).
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- Mendelson, M. (2019). [Lessons from Ontario's basic income pilot](#). *Maytree*.

¹⁶ Gentilini et al. (2020). [Exploring Universal Basic Income: A Guide to Navigating Concepts, Evidence, and Practices](#). *World Bank Group*.

¹⁷ Psychologists for Social Change (2017). [Universal Basic Income: A Psychological Impact Assessment](#). *Centre for Welfare Reform*. PAA: London.

¹⁸ Psychologists for Social Change (2017).

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- Payne, E. (2021). [Working in long-term care by day, sleeping in a shelter by night: The economic realities of life as a PSW](#). Ottawa Citizen.
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- The Parliamentary Budget Officer. (2021). [Update: Five-year cost estimate of the guaranteed basic income](#). *Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO)*.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2020). [Research brief: Effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions on homicide and property crime](#).
- Young, M. & Mulvale, P.J. (2009). [Possibilities and prospects: The debate over a guaranteed income](#). *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives*.