



Dear Party Leader,

The National Council of Canada Board of Directors of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society supports the establishment of a means tested Basic Income program to help alleviate poverty in Canada.

Our charitable organization consists of over 14,000 volunteers who visit our neighbours in need from coast to coast to coast in Canada. Annually we visit over 150,000 households, bringing food, clothing and furniture vouchers. Thousands more are assisted through our soup kitchens, shelters and drop-ins.

Our personal interactions with the people in need allow us to witness first-hand how many families, dependent on social assistance and minimum wage employment, struggle to keep food on the table and a decent roof over their heads. Those households not entitled to Child Benefits or the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors are especially hard pressed. Provincial social assistance programs across Canada are generally burdened with excessive administrative red tape, inadequate rates of assistance and rules that act as disincentives to employment or opportunities to improve financial standing. Workers engaged in low-paying precarious employment are literally earning 'poverty wages.'

We believe it is time for a means tested National Basic Income program, designed to lift people out of poverty, as the Child Benefit and Income Supplement programs have succeeded in doing. Statistics Canada confirms that since their inceptions, Child Benefit has reduced child poverty from 15% to 8% and Income Supplement has been instrumental in keeping the poverty rate for seniors at around 3% (versus the overall poverty rate of over 9%).

We have also seen how CERB, a similar relief program to Basic Income, helped Canadians weather the financial storms caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, Statistics Canada reports that during the pandemic, the poverty rate in Canada dipped from 10.3% in 2019 to 7.4% in 2021. Since CERB has been discontinued, the poverty rate has risen back close to the pre-pandemic level!

There are several types of Basic Income models that could be adapted for this purpose. In 2019 Basic Income Canada published a detailed paper (authored by Chandra Pasma and Sheila Regehr) outlining costed practical policy options to initiate a Basic Income. In 2020 and in an updated 2025 report, the Parliamentary Budget Office outlined the practicality and affordability of a Basic Income program and estimated it could reduce Canada's poverty rate by 40%.

The modest extra cost of this program would be offset by the discontinuation and rolling-in of existing tax credits and programs and compensated by the savings realized through better health outcomes, the freedom and means for participants to improve their skillsets and the economic stimulation realized when people have more money to spend in their local communities. All these outcomes have been noted and measured in jurisdictions where Basic Income programs have been tested or initiated.

In summary, a Basic Income program is an affordable, proven and practical means of lifting thousands of Canadians out of the debilitating, unhealthy and hopeless depths of poverty. The time to act is now!

I look forward to your response and to hear what you and your party intend to do in order to make Basic Income a reality for low-income Canadians.

National Council, Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Canada