



Foundations for Action  
**Basic Income Guarantee**  
for the NWT Report

# Community Summary



*Alternatives North*

March 28th, 2023  
By Alternatives North  
for the Government of  
the Northwest Territories



# Foundations for Action

## Basic Income Guarantee for the NWT Report

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*Alternatives North*

**Alternatives North** is a Northwest Territories social justice coalition based in Yellowknife. Members include churches, labour unions, environmental organizations, women and family advocates, anti-poverty groups, and individuals with an interest in our work. <https://alternativenorth.ca>



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We dedicate this report to the young people of the NWT, with the aim that they grow up in a beautiful, sustainable land, free of poverty, full of hope and opportunities for all.

# COMMUNITY SUMMARY

At a time when many people in the Northwest Territories (NWT) are struggling, a basic income guarantee could lift almost everyone out of poverty. But this policy goes beyond poverty reduction with its transformational potential. A basic income guarantee can allow people to go back to school, retrain for a new job, or start their own business. It can allow others to care for aging or sick loved ones, volunteer in their community, find appropriate housing, recover from stress or trauma, and put healthy food on the table. This report emphasizes the importance of broad consultation and detailed modelling. Alternatives North is calling for the following steps to move forward with design and delivery:

- 1** Public awareness, education and dialogue should be supported by NWT government and non-government organizations and must include diverse voices from across the territory.
- 2** Basic income guarantee design options should be studied and modelled to show their impacts on people in the NWT and to weigh benefits and costs.
- 3** The Government of the NWT (GNWT) should take concrete steps towards the implementation of a basic income guarantee through pilots or program development.
- 4** The federal government should be encouraged to invest in a basic income guarantee.
- 5** The GNWT should be encouraged to move programs in a direction consistent with a basic income guarantee.
- 6** The relationship between a basic income guarantee and Indigenous self-determination should be fully explored.

## What is a Basic Income Guarantee?

A basic income is a regular government payment to people - enough that everyone can meet basic needs, live with dignity, and participate in society, with no requirement to meet certain conditions, including paid work.

In the basic income *guarantee* model the income is there when you *need* it. This is how seniors' and children's benefits work. Not everyone gets a cheque for the same amount. With an income guarantee, if you have a great job with a living wage or more, you get a smaller payment, or maybe none. If you're struggling and need more help, your payment is bigger, up to an income floor that you can't fall below.

## A Design that Makes Sense for the NWT

A review of published literature, conversations with experts inside and outside the GNWT, and a virtual public forum in mid-February showed that a basic income guarantee has to be built around the realities of life and public policy in the NWT. The system must be flexible, fair, effective, and actively include a diverse range of Indigenous voices and values. There should be lots of opportunities for people to find out how a basic income guarantee works before the program begins.

A basic income guarantee can make life better for people in the NWT as long as:

- The guaranteed benefit is enough to help recipients meet their basic expenses and live with dignity - to take part in the life of the community, pursue retraining or higher education if they want to, and take part in traditional activities
- The benefit level reflects the higher cost of living in the North, and differences in costs among NWT regions and communities
- Benefits are set up to support people who move in and out of paid jobs, and who live with multiple adults in a single household
- The system doesn't limit or complicate access to housing and disability benefits, mental health supports, job creation programs, or other social programs
- The income calculation doesn't claw back specific entitlements that reflect treaty and other types of reparations

Specific design details must factor in a list of important, often fairly technical details, including:

- Indigenous leadership and values
- How long a recipient has lived in the NWT
- The pros and cons of monthly versus biweekly payments
- Payment options for people who can't receive direct deposits, or don't have access to computers or the internet

## Delivering a Basic Income Guarantee in the NWT

Once the program is designed, there are a few different ways the GNWT can start delivering it - on its own or in cooperation with the federal government, as a pilot project, or as a full program. One way or another, the next steps are to listen to people and communities, design the details of the program, and start generating direct experience. These steps will tell us how best to deliver a basic income guarantee that meets the unique needs of people in the NWT.

Please read the full Foundations for Action: Basic Income Guarantee for the NWT Report to learn more about this transformational opportunity for our territory and its diverse peoples.