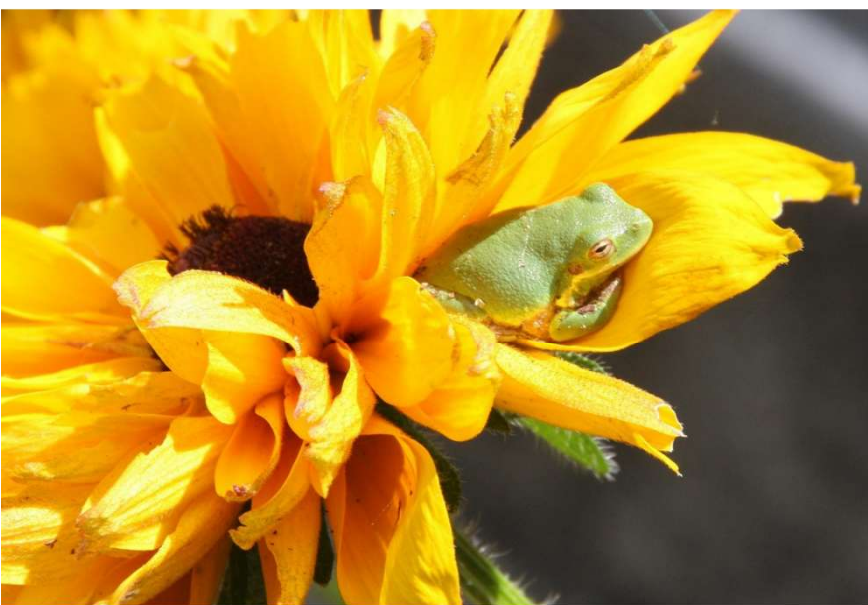


Points of View on
**BASIC INCOME
GUARANTEE**
for Prince Edward Island

Vol. 2



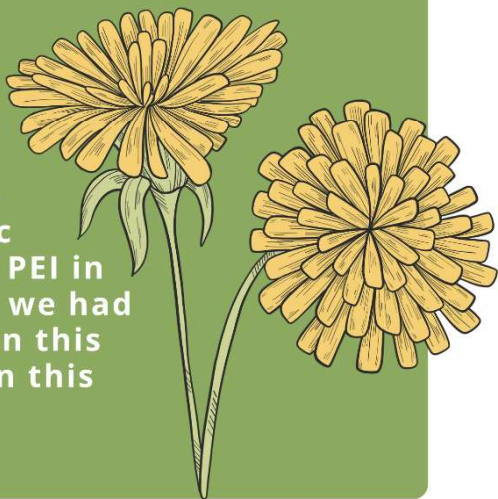
PEI Working Group for Livable Income
peiwgli.com
2026

We dedicate this collection to Marie Burge, co-founder and long-time member of the PEI Working Group for a Livable Income.

At the time of publication, Marie is in the last days of her life, a life of moral courage, vision, and inspiration for a world of love, compassion, and human dignity—a life that envisions basic income guarantee.

This commentary series is our love letter to Marie, to express our deep care for her by showing her, in no uncertain terms, that we will continue to work to guarantee a basic income for all.

Dearest Marie, we so wanted to see a basic income guarantee in PEI in your lifetime. If only we had more time with you in this work, and with you in this world.





Sophie Burns (she/her) is a student art therapist, candidate for a Graduate Level Diploma in Art Therapy (DTATI), and a member of the PEI Working Group for a Livable Income.

Guaranteeing a Basic Income Is Good Health Policy

As a student art therapist working with clients at a community organization, I spend much of my time listening. I hear about people's lives—their hopes, their worries, their creativity, and what it takes to get through each week. While every person's story is different, one reality comes up again and again: financial insecurity is negatively impacting people's mental health, their relationships, and their ability to imagine a future. And whether we experience it directly or not, none of us are untouched by its effects.

We often talk about mental health as if it exists in a vacuum. We encourage therapy, self-care, and resilience—all of which matter deeply. But resilience is impossible to sustain when people are struggling to meet their basic needs and facing constant financial uncertainty. You cannot mindfully-meditate your way out of chronic financial fear any more than you can budget your way out of poverty. A society that expects people to simply try harder is not promoting well-being; it is normalizing quiet suffering.

EXAMINE THE POND

There is a saying often used in public health: if we find a frog that is sick, we do not blame the frog—we examine the pond. We look at the environment and the conditions that made illness more likely. Yet we rarely apply the same logic to people, often asking why they're not coping better instead of whether the conditions they face are compatible with human dignity.

Income is one of the strongest determinants of health we have. Poverty and financial precarity are linked to anxiety, depression, substance use, chronic illness, burnout, and psychological distress—not because people are failing, but because constant uncertainty places the nervous system under relentless strain. It shrinks people's capacity to plan, to rest, to heal, and to participate fully in community life.

When an economic system prioritizes productivity over people and ties survival to income, instability is not a flaw—it is part of the design. Over time, this logic trains us to measure worth by output and endurance, eroding our ability to recognize one another, and ourselves, as deserving of care, dignity, and security simply because we are human.

There is a saying often used in public health: if we find a frog that is sick, we do not blame the frog—we examine the pond.

COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

This affects all Islanders. Even those who feel relatively stable live in communities shaped by this stress: overcrowded emergency rooms, understaffed schools, burned-out workers, overextended caregivers, and neighbours one crisis away from collapse. When people cannot meet their basic needs, the social fabric frays.

Community well-being is not something individuals opt into or out of; we all live inside the conditions we collectively create.

When people have stability, they participate more fully in community life. They care for loved ones, pursue education, volunteer, and show up for one another. They are healthier, less stressed, and better able to contribute. A society that allows people to breathe is one that functions better—socially, emotionally, and economically.

That is why the conversation about a Guaranteed Basic Income in Prince Edward Island matters. This is not a niche issue or a “helping the poor” policy.

It is about how we want life on this Island to function, and whether we believe people deserve not only to survive, but to thrive. A Guaranteed Basic Income is a viable policy option that could meaningfully reshape our social safety net.

For more than twenty years, advocates, community organizations, researchers, and policymakers here have worked toward a vision of income security grounded in dignity. Today, PEI has a realistic, well-developed proposal for a Guaranteed Basic Income, with rare cross-party support and growing national attention as a potential demonstration project.

The proposal is ambitious, but it is also grounded. It aims to reduce poverty while maintaining essential public systems such as health care, disability supports, labour protections, and social programs.

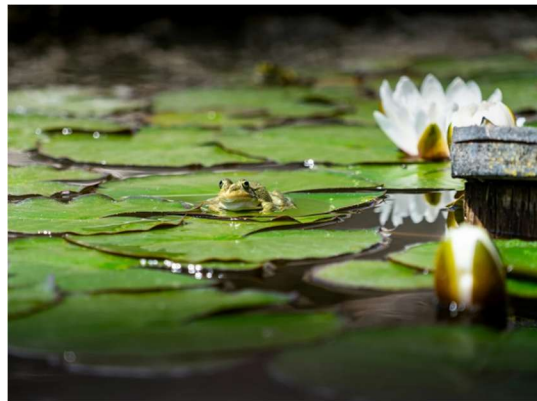


Photo credit: David Vives/Unsplash

Community well-being is not something individuals opt into or out of; we all live inside the conditions we collectively create.

It recognizes a crucial truth: income security is not a replacement for public services; it is the floor that allows those services to work as intended.

That floor benefits all of us.

A COLLECTIVE INSURANCE

This matters not only for those currently struggling, but for anyone who has ever been sick, changed jobs, had a child, lost a partner, faced disability, or aged. No one is immune to vulnerability. Income security is collective insurance against the inevitabilities of being human.

From a mental health perspective, this distinction matters enormously.

A Guaranteed Basic Income would not solve every problem, but it would establish something deeply radical in practice: a shared commitment that no one falls below a basic standard of living simply because they are human. A guaranteed income floor creates breathing room—the ability to make choices from a place of stability rather than survival.

Critics often ask whether we can afford a Guaranteed Basic Income. The more important question is whether we can afford *not to*. The question isn't whether poverty is expensive; we know it is. The question is, do we want more buckets or a boat with significantly fewer holes?

Guaranteeing a basic income is not only good economic policy. It is good health policy. It is good mental health policy. And it is an opportunity for Prince Edward Island to lead as we know we can—by choosing care, dignity, and collective well-being, and by ensuring that no one is left behind.

Income security is collective insurance against the inevitabilities of being human.





Susan Hartley, Ph.D. (Psychology), she/her, is a global peace scholar, editor of *Global Voices for Peace: An Introduction to Peacebuilders and the Hope They Bring*. She lives in Georgetown Royalty, PEI, and is a member of the PEIWGLI.

An Equitable Society Is a Secure Society

In my September 2025 commentary in the *Guardian* “Security Starts at Home,” I challenged decision makers in our federal and provincial governments to recognize that, as they strive to make our country more secure in the face of threats to our sovereignty and economy, they must pay attention and address the structural and institutional inequalities within our society that contribute to a lack of security and stability.

We hear almost daily about plans for increased spending on militarization, defence, and border control in response to external threats, yet we hear less, if anything, about the threat that comes from the increasing income gap or about any plans to make systemic changes to how we care for the most economically—and therefore socially—vulnerable or disadvantaged in our communities.

RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

While writing about the humanitarian crisis in Sudan recently, former Canadian Foreign Minister, Lloyd Axworthy stated, “Human security begins with a simple idea: the safety of states depends on the safety of people.”

He advocates for a renewed human security foreign policy, one that applies the Responsibility to Protect doctrine wherein the international community has a duty to respond to crises and threats of crises through peaceful means.

The research in Peace clearly indicates that the same reasoning and logic applies to building resilience within our country’s boundaries and ensuring that people are safe, secure, and free from the structural and systemic violence inherent in the levels of poverty, homelessness, and inequity in our society. Our governments have a duty and responsibility to protect locally and internationally.

As I stated in my commentary of September, here in PEI we have a policy proposal on the table that will take us a long way toward building security at home and throughout the whole country: Basic Income Guarantee. The PEI Working Group for a Livable Income has been the driving force for BIG for the past 22 years. The group has worked with advocates across Canada to develop this fully costed proposal.

We can create a fairer, more secure, and more peaceful country and reduce the threats that emanate from a society that does not care for all members.

Through BIG, resources are distributed more equitably and the right for all people to have their basic needs met is actualized. This proposal is in the hands of the PEI Provincial government and the Federal government. It is ready to move forward, and has the support of economists, politicians, and the broader community.

PEI BIG DEMONSTRATION

Moving forward with the PEI BIG demonstration project, which will eradicate deep poverty, waits for political will, direction from our Premier and Prime Minister, and an understanding by decision makers that a guaranteed basic income is a critical tool in a nation's security plan - the recognition that they must not just consider defence measures, but consider how every person in Canada is doing.

The threat to our social safety nets and to expenditures aimed at increasing the well-being of people living in Canada is real and affects a significant portion of our population on a daily basis. By tackling income

inequity, food insecurity, and housing insecurity we can create a fairer, more secure, and more peaceful country and reduce the threats that emanate from a society that does not care for all members.

We just need to look south of our border to a country where inequity grew along with a promise of equity that was never realized to see what happens when these threats are ignored.

Policy such as BIG transforms the structures and systems that currently sustain poverty in our country and a country that eradicates, or at least significantly decreases, poverty is a securer and more stable society.

THE CHALLENGE

To restate the challenge I put to all of us previously: imagine how much more secure and resilient our communities and our province would be if everyone had their basic needs met through a guaranteed income, and if everyone had the opportunity to flourish. We have the research; we have the evidence; we have the means: Basic Income Guarantee. We all have a role in creating a secure society: speak to your MLA and your MP—they know about the PEI BIG proposal; you might want to remind them.

Barbara Boraks (she/her) is a member of Coalition Canada basic income/revenu de base and is a lead for the PEI/GBI project, and Rita Jackson (she/her) is district director, National Farmers Union, District 1 (PEI).

Canada Is Dropping the Ball on Poverty

Prime Minister Carney has taken on the extraordinary job of steering Canada through a time of massive shifts in economies, jobs, climate, even societal norms. The Prime Minister, in his book *Values*, noted that his own experiences as a G7 governor led him to recognize “a series of crises with a common cause—a crisis of values in which the values of the market are usurping those of humanity.”

The PM is working tirelessly to try to shore up the foundations of our economy in a world where the sea bed of rules is going through massive changes. If every issue is a ball which needs to be kept in the air, we cannot even fathom the number of balls that need to be juggled and kept moving. We’re sure that sometimes balls are dropped—we are all human—in the hope that it can be picked up again.

With an apparent laser focus on shoring up our economy it appears, however, that one ball may have been dropped: helping those living in poverty and those who are perilously close to falling into the poverty trap.

STRUCTURAL ISSUES

We hear the litany of supports the Government has created to help people most in need, but these

announcements just continue what so many previous governments have done: act in response to Opposition talking points rather than looking at the structural issues which lie at the basis of a social support system that keeps people in poverty.

Perhaps the Prime Minister and his caucus believe that we need to tackle the issues one at a time. First, build a strong economy, and then turn attention to those living in, or perilously close to, poverty. But why does it have to be one at a time? Is it because the economy is not strong enough to handle structural changes to our social support system? Or does this approach tilt towards a market lens while moving away from humanity. The latest announcement, \$3 billion for creating a “stronger, more affordable food system” is, perhaps, an example of this.

As the announcement noted, Canada is one of the largest exporters of agri-food products in the world. Agriculture and agri-food systems contribute about 7% to the national GDP and rural communities account for about 30% of Canada’s total GDP.

HELP FOR FARM WORKERS

Even though there is mention of helping small and medium sized “businesses,” the strategy appears to be skewed to industry.

A basic income would ensure that small and medium-sized farms and farmers would not fall into the cracks created by a market—and industry—based bias.

Yes, agriculture is an industry and there are many changes to structural issues which could help strengthen our food systems. But nothing in the strategy appears to be geared towards directly helping small and medium sized farms and farmers. What these people need is to be able to stop working 2 or 3 jobs to keep their farm; they need their farm workers to be able to stay in the community; they need to be able to pass down their farms to their children or to others who want to keep it a small or medium-sized farm; they need the population of rural communities to stop falling.

What they need is a basic income.

The Case for Basic Income for Agriculture outlines 3 key areas: farmer and farm worker livelihoods; rural economies, and resilient food systems. A basic income would not lessen the need for an overhaul of our agri and agri food system, but it would ensure that small and medium-sized farms and farmers would not fall into the cracks created by a market—and industry—based bias.

We need the Federal and PEI Governments to follow up on the proposal that came out of the Basic Income Working Group established in 2024.

Minister MacDonald and many MPs and MLAs are aware of the PEI/GBI report which outlines what a PEI/Federal government basic income demonstration project could look like. The report has been lauded by many economists, politicians, and policy leaders. The “ask” being made of both governments is to take the issue one step at a time: work through the report; update the numbers; understand the implications of a basic income; move towards negotiations to establish a five- to seven-year demonstration project in PEI.

PRAGMATIC STEPS

It is a pragmatic and reasonable process. It can be done at the same time as economic developments are taking place. It will provide the Governments with the necessary empirical data to be able to move forward on re-building Canada's out of date and ineffective social support system. It could help MPs, MLAs and policy leaders understand the impact a basic income could have not only on farmers, but on health, food insecurity, fisheries, internal security – and even on our overall economy. Why wouldn't you want this information?

By supporting the Federal/PEI basic income Working Group the Canadian and PEI Governments will send a clear message that they believe the market and humanity are equally important.



Michelle Jay (she/her) is the Program Coordinator at the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women, which is a founding organizational member of the Working Group for a Livable Income.

Choosing Care: Implementing Basic Income Guarantee

Caregiving has long been undervalued and unacknowledged. It's the often-invisible tasks that hold people and families in relationship, providing physical labour and emotional and mental support. It's the caring for one another that holds communities together and allows our economy to thrive. Without childcare, parents can't work. Without long-term care and home care, families are pushed out of the workforce. Without nurses, teachers, personal support workers, and early childhood educators and assistants, there is no productivity, no innovation, and no economic growth.

Caregiving encompasses tasks and responsibilities that enable people to live independently and participate in community. Caregiving can be provided for older adults, people with disabilities, children, and community wellbeing. Caregiving means providing health and physical care, mental, spiritual and emotional care, meaningful social connection—activities can run the entire gamut of imagination. Sometimes caregiving is a paid, professional responsibility. Often, it is not remunerated at all. Nearly half of Canadians aged 15 or older reported providing some form of care in 2022 (Stats Can, 2022b).

Caregiving is such a significant aspect of daily life that we have coined the term “caregiving economy.” Considering unpaid labour alone, research shows that “approximately 7.8 million Canadians—one in five adults—are providing unpaid care to a family member or friend with a long-term health condition, disability, or age-related need. Their collective labour is worth an estimated \$97.1 billion annually—more than the entire GDP of Saskatchewan.”

WHO CARES?

Although there are significant improvements to the balance of who provides care, women are primarily responsible. Historical, traditional gendered divisions of labour aren't serving us, especially considering that women are often full-time employees in the labour force *and* predominantly providing caregiving to families and communities. This can amount to a double work day, with the second shift of caregiving starting after the paid work day. The work of making appointments, providing emotional care, housework and making meals, ferrying kids to activities—it can be overwhelming. Most household and community caregiving is invisible and unpaid. Not only is it leading women

Late midlife Canadians are feeling the period of care extending, spanning years of care between children and parents.

to burnout, it also creates conditions where many women who care-give are left without care themselves.

Race and status play a role in caregiving, as care work is disproportionately provided by Indigenous, racialized, and immigrant women. In the Canadian care economy, both paid and unpaid, women of colour are overrepresented and undervalued. We increasingly see that it's racialized women who provide essential care to our elders and children while earning low wages and benefits.

GENERATIONAL SQUEEZE

An increasing trend is the generational squeeze. Late midlife Canadians are feeling the period of care extending, spanning years of care between children and parents. The “sandwich generation” has become increasingly strained by providing care to children and young adults who are staying home longer and need more support while simultaneously caring for parents who are living longer and desiring care that lets them live independently. Middle generation earners are finding themselves responsible for the care needs of youth AND elders—straddling the care needs of this wide generational gap of diverse needs is known as elongated caregiving.

HOW WOULD BASIC INCOME GUARANTEE HELP?

Basic income provides an income floor, which allows folks to meet basic needs regardless of earned income. Knowing basic needs are met would allow for choice: to work part-time and provide care, to pay for respite care, to provide care and to prevent health crises, to spend time providing care when it matters most, in times of periodic illness or sudden health needs. A basic income would give carers an assurance that they can leave the labour force and still be supported with enough for basic living.

Many of us would choose to give up some of our paid work to provide those we love with what they need to survive and thrive if we knew we could access a minimum basic income—so many people want to provide loving care to our families and communities. However, that love is not enough, and we cannot keep shaming those who need help and resources to continue. Women and caregivers are exhausted, and need resources to provide care to others without compromising wellbeing.

A basic income guarantee is the best option to value caregiving and make Canada a nation of healthier, happier, kinder people.



Noah Moss (he/they) is a 22-year-old textile artist, illustrator, and advocate from East Royalty, PEI. He is currently working for CreativePEI, where he was introduced to the PEI Working Group for a Livable Income.

Hope for an Equitable Future

In the latter half of the 2020s, my generation, “Gen Z”, spans from fresh teens to young adults pushing 30. “Gen Z” is a label with many negative connotations, and as a teenager I found discomfort being associated with it. Nowadays, I see the kind hearts and bright minds of my peers. My generation had to learn that creating substantial change is an uphill battle, so when a government idles in inadequacies while turning a deaf ear to our voices, we yell.

Since graduating high school in 2021, I’ve bounced between jobs, educational institutions, and community support programs. Every experience was an opportunity to meet new people with diverse life experiences. From what I’ve seen, it is financial struggles that push people down the most.

My friends leave a day at university to work late-night shifts, restless as they study through to dawn. Summers spent cramming overtime hours cannot guarantee enough savings for the academic year. Those not studying work long days in the heavily exploited world of shift work, where the promise of wage stability and proper benefits is increasingly rare.

Even while they struggle to stay afloat, debating over which necessities to buy each week, these youth remain advocates; people who value the lives of others over personal profit. I see this immense physical and emotional burnout around me and think “how lucky are we?”, knowing thousands are trapped in substantially worse conditions.

MOVING BEYOND FALLACIES

A 2020 study from Angus Reid Institute showed up to 10% higher net support for basic income guarantee (BIG) from Canadians aged 18–34 compared to respondents aged 55+. It also indicated higher sentiment from older demographics that BIG would discourage people from working. This reflects a prevalent fallacy that denies crucial facts surrounding poverty and the benefits of BIG.

The “just-world fallacy” is built on the idea that people “get what they deserve”. For those who were born or achieved high status, it is easy to turn a blind eye and think that everyone is equally capable of success—ignoring the factors that uplift them while pushing down others. The belief that poverty is an individual failing can only exist in a bubble of willful ignorance, ignoring that anyone can fall into hardship by no fault of their own.

Even while they struggle to stay afloat, debating over which necessities to buy each week, these youth remain advocates; people who value the lives of others over personal profit.

I find my peers are less prone to outdated judgments of the “deserving” and “undeserving”, notions which stop meaningful movement towards policy reform. In an age of globalization, we are able to learn from structural injustices and solutions around the world. The increase in income inequality, loss of community safety nets, and degradation of basic human rights that we’ve witnessed growing up makes fallacious worldviews difficult to uphold.

Youth today understand that our community cannot thrive without the kinship and solidarity of “dependence.” Research indicates that lower-income people contribute disproportionately to the life and vibrancy of society, and are more likely to participate within their community with high empathy and compassion towards others.

A POLICY OF DIGNITY

Our social support systems are built with precarious qualifiers and time limits that lead to people cycling within programs rife with stigma and conditionality, infringing on basic human dignity.

Notably, these programs are not subject to the debates and skepticism that BIG has been subject to for decades. Other government expenditures, however questionable, are routinely passed without such dialogue or fanfare.

TIME TO ACT ON EVIDENCE

Decades of research and pilot programs show that BIG provides the stability and income security that people need to pursue work opportunities, training, or education. The improvements to health and well-being brought on by BIG, as an unconditional and destigmatized form of support, are undeniable.

It is on policymakers to acknowledge the piles of evidence that point to this. The decision to finance BIG has always been a political and moral choice based on deeply rooted values and beliefs.

We are in a time when continuing to ignore the problems within our systems is inexcusable—especially for those in seats of power. Our community needs change, not just for the benefit of my generation, or the stability of generations who came before me, but for the future of the children who are already being ridiculed for behaviours and actions that are direct results of the systemic and cultural failings in their surroundings.



Jane Ledwell (she/her) of Charlottetown has been a member of the PEI Working Group for a Livable Income for more than twenty years, most recently representing CreativePEI.

A Generational Investment

A basic income guarantee is coming. One day we will wonder how we ever accepted a society without it. How was it that some people were denied the basics for a dignified life, while others were allowed to decimate our finite resources and amass exorbitant personal wealth?

The moment of inevitability may come as a result of calamity: loss of human jobs to automation and artificial intelligence, economic collapse, climate chaos. But, if we act swiftly and together, basic income guarantee's moment can arise from the hopeful, democratic will of the community. We can choose to act with kindness and compassion for the greater good.

That is the moment we are working for: the moment we collectively recognize that we can live in a society whose first obligation is to each other. When unfettered wealth for the few doesn't come at the expense of basic living for so many. When our social and economic priority is for our neighbours to have the income they require to meet their needs and build a life in health and dignity. Our work in the world is first and always to care for each other in our fragile humanity, and that is not always, or even often, paid work.

We must be ready for the moment BIG is inevitable. That means keeping the work and the knowledge of the people alive in the heart of community, even through times of challenge.

It feels like a time of challenge right now, because so much momentum for basic income guarantee feels stalled, just on the brink of possibility.

After ten years of all-party political consensus in PEI and acceptance of recommendations from a Special Committee on Poverty, national thinkers on BIG were led to develop an actionable, feasible, affordable model for a guaranteed basic income demonstration program. The proposed program would commence province-wide in PEI and be scalable to all of Canada, a national program like Medicare, our public healthcare program, which also began in one province, Saskatchewan.

A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

The BIG plan relies on PEI's strong voice to engage and encourage the federal government in a shared investment. Unfortunately, the provincial government is failing to meet the moment and is risking the momentum we have built together.

Neither Premier Lantz's government-wide mandate nor the departmental priorities published this spring in response identified basic income guarantee as a provincial priority. The PEI government should show leadership on a genuinely nation-building project. But at precisely the moment PEI should be signalling persistence—and insistence—to the federal government, that falter in our elected voice sends the opposite message.

Much discussion has centred on getting provincial spending under control. Even in this time of fiscal constraint, basic income guarantee is an urgent investment. Debt and deficits are not our only obligations.

We owe current and future generations a society where everyone can live with dignity, participate in our community, and contribute their talents. The costs of poverty are paid many times over through poor health, low productivity, and lost potential. Investing in people will leave future generations a freer, more humane society. In the end, our children will inherit the consequences of our choices—not our bond ratings, but our values.

Yet, advocacy is never only about policy, and there is an extra purpose to this series. The dedication on the inside cover page describes that purpose, to honour Marie Burge.

We honour her commitment and all we have learned with her.

We don't do this work for the next generation, but across generations. It is intergenerational work, to achieve a generational investment in people. It is the work of a lifetime.

Basic income guarantee is coming. We will keep up the vision and momentum: we will be ready.



Marie Burge (left) receiving the King's Coronation Medal from Sen. Kim Pate, June 2025.

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