



Basic income: a wicked solution to a wicked policy problem

Conveners: Professor Jon Altman, Dr Jenni Mays and Dr Elise Klein

The purpose of the workshop is to progress basic income debates by exploring the potential for designing strategies and project activities toward implementing a basic income scheme in Australia. The expected outcomes are: strategic development of national policy research agenda on basic income, situating Australia at centre of debates, conceptual framework development, and an edited production for extending policy debates.

Big policy ideas such as the basic income scheme are necessary for responding to the 'wicked policy problems' of entrenched poverty and widening inequalities. In the proposed workshop, academic scholars are the co-collaborators, co-creators and innovators in driving the policy agenda for transitioning to a basic income and putting forward concrete strategies for policy change.

Basic income is coming to the forefront of the policy agenda in our region. Policy debates and activism have in part contributed to the resurgence. This is the first time since the Henderson Poverty Report in 1975 that a basic income has gained closer attention in policy spheres. With the proposal gaining momentum nationally and globally, Australia is uniquely positioned to extend debates about the merits of a basic income scheme. However, the increased need for greater *sophistication in the debate and design of basic income*, necessitates further debate on ethical justifications underpinning a basic income, and exploration of strategies and conceptual; framework to transition to basic income in Australia. The proposed workshop would put social scientists, scholars and policy-makers at the forefront of innovative policy design and implementation.

The workshop has five objectives:

- i. Each invited participant is to present a paper on one of two themes to extend current debates on unconditional basic income as a progressive social policy.
- ii. Each invited participant contributes to one of two Roundtable sessions and is actively involved in developing strategies, and designing a concrete basic income proposal and project activities in Australia and Asia Pacific region.
- iii. To influence, inspire and engage policy-makers, scholars and the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA) through producing and disseminating policy reports and guides.
- iv. To produce and publish an edited book from the papers presented at the workshop.
- v. To implement strategies for project sustainability by sourcing basic income policy research teams and organising a series of post workshop events (create campaigns and progress project activities).

The idea of universal basic income in Australia is experiencing a resurgence because of the widening disparities and inequalities. Extending debates on basic income in Australia is both timely and crucial. The failures of neoliberal ideology in not delivering a socially just and

equitable society means social protection remains inequitable as not all citizens are treated fairly (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Standing, 2014). Neoliberal policies and broad institutional changes have impeded scholarly debate on an alternative vision of a good society and alternative programs of progressive social, economic, political and cultural reform. It is critical to progress ideas and co-create a common vision for the return to economic and social security through basic income as a progressive redistributive strategy and develop concrete proposals to support the transition (Mays, Marston & Tomlinson, 2016).

Economic insecurity brought about by neoliberal policies have sparked renewed global interest in the merits of basic income (Mays et al., 2016). For the past forty years governments have pursued neoliberal policies in shaping Australian welfare. These neoliberal policies have led to deregulated markets and a shrinking welfare safety net. The enduring nature of neoliberalism has had a profound impact on Australia's social protection whereby there has been an ideological and a philosophical shift away from the notion of collective benefits to individual self-reliance and market-oriented policies.

The right to a decent income and access to resources is cornerstone to living a good life. Basic income as an unconditional grant paid by the government to all permanent residents provides something on which a person can safely count, a material foundation on which a life can firmly rests (Van Parijs, 2007). It also provides a buffer for vulnerable groups such as people living in poverty, children and young people, single parents and people with a disability.

Global debates on basic income have progressed beyond philosophical discussions to the design and implementation of experiments especially in parts of Europe, South America, Southern Africa and India. The outcomes of these projects demonstrate the potential of the proposal to present as an egalitarian and collective redistributive strategy (Standing, 2014).

Even with the potential of implementing a basic income model there are complexities associated with a transition to the scheme in this region. The politics within a single nation will ultimately determine the way a basic income is implemented. Transitioning to a basic income requires critically analysing the strategies for and the potential barriers to implementing a basic income scheme. At its core, the proposed workshop provides a space for collective scholarly and critical thinker voice to develop a *common vision* and engage in *strategic planning* to ensure basic income is introduced as an unconditional citizenship right (Standing, 2014). The proposed workshop is a forum to promote deeper level, scholarly critical thinking and action.

In the lead up to the proposed workshop, an independent and separate basic income event will be conducted in April in Melbourne. It is expected that the Melbourne event will provide further feedback from academics, politicians, policy-makers, and activists into the proposed basic income workshop. The feedback will provide a voice from external stakeholders and garnering broad based political support for getting basic income onto the policy agenda. The Melbourne workshop will also build momentum for the proposed workshop.

If the application is successful, the proposed workshop will present a unique opportunity to bring together scholars and researchers to collaborate on RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufacturers and Commerce) and an Australian Research Council (ARC) linkage grant projects. In convening the proposed workshop we acknowledge the broad spectrum of participants come from diverse disciplines spanning political and social science, sociology, economics, law and justice, medical social science, and action research.

Contributing concrete proposals and evidence helps shape and influence policy debates and ultimately guide policy-making. The idea of the proposed workshop is to have *a policy impact* by progressing often neglected solutions onto the political agenda. The three themes of the workshop are:

Theme 1 Policy Innovation: Stepping into the unknown.

The first session sets the scene for progressing debates on basic income and developing an innovative conceptual framework. The session will explore historical and contemporary basic income ethical justifications and innovations nationally and globally. Innovation also implies consideration of the nature of the transformation in social protection, the extent of redistribution, the character of the tax system and the pattern of work incentives.

Theme 2 Policy preparedness: Negotiating the policy landscape.

This session on policy preparedness is designed to explore the policy context of transitioning to a basic income and what it takes to prepare Australia for basic income trials. Examining the major hurdles (assumptions, false claims, cost, distributional impact and feasibility) helps to frame the challenges and inform strategies that safeguard implementation phases (sustainability). Policy preparedness also focuses in on the necessary conditions and ethical foundations required for implementing a fair and just basic income scheme.

Theme 3 Policy implementation: Prospects for basic income in the Australian space.

The sessions are in the format of roundtable discussions and co-creation strategies. The sessions will be used to consolidate ideas from the paper presentations and leverage the identification and setting of concrete activities and future actions.

It is envisaged that a new collective spirit will emerge from the proposed workshop and be a solid platform for future activities.