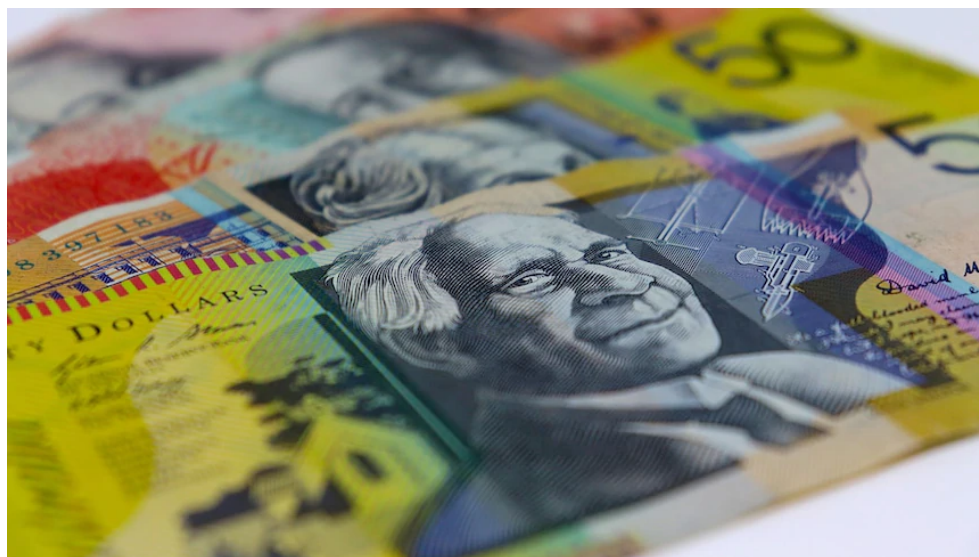


## A majority of Australians would welcome a universal basic income, survey finds

By business reporter [Gareth Hutchens](#)

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A universal basic income is a cash payment given to all members of a community on a regular basis, regardless of income level and with no strings attached. (Unsplash: Debora Cardenas)

Nearly two-thirds of Australians say they would support the introduction of a universal basic income (UBI), according to a new poll.

The finding comes after millions of Australians were forced to rely on some kind of regular welfare payment this year to survive the COVID recession.

According to Stanford University's Basic Income Lab, at its core, a UBI is a cash payment given to all members of a community on a regular basis (for example every month) regardless of income level and with no strings attached.

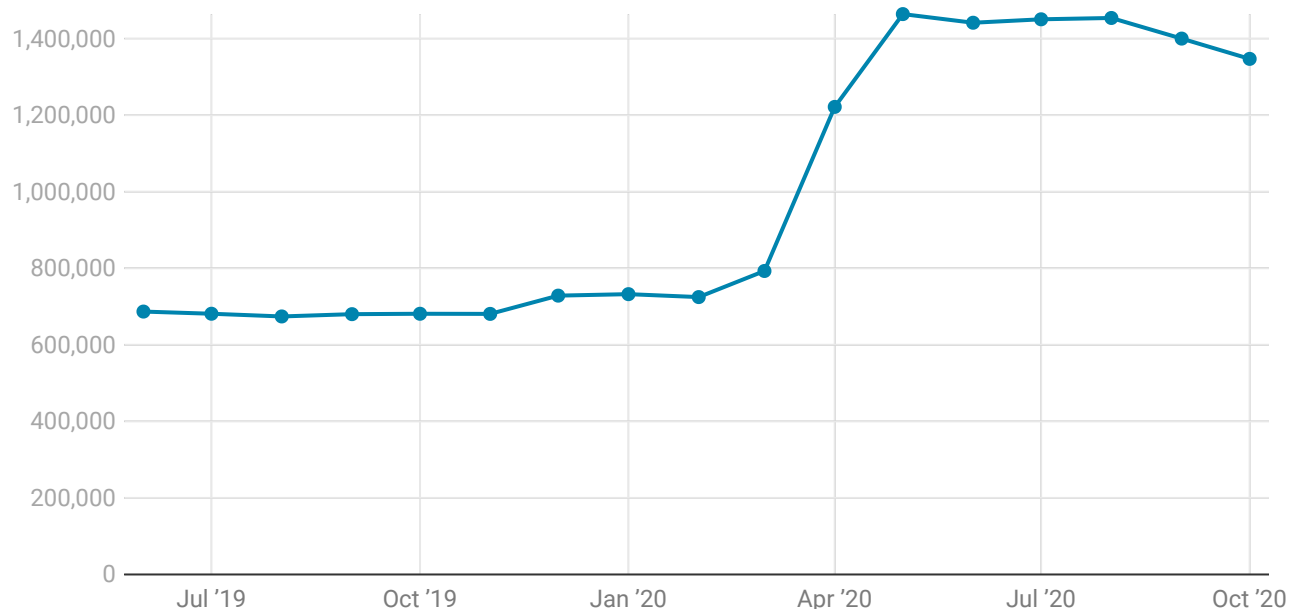
More than 3.6 million workers received JobKeeper payments between March and September (totalling nearly \$70 billion), and 1.5 million were still receiving the payments after the program was revised in October.

The number of Australians receiving JobSeeker unemployment payments almost doubled this year, jumping from 724,000 in February to 1.46 million in May, and by October that figure had only retraced a little to 1.35 million.

### Key points:

- 58 per cent of Australians support a universal basic income
- The COVID lockdowns may have increased sympathy for UBI
- A large number of Australians would spend more time with family and friends, and doing physical activities, if they received UBI

## Number of JobSeeker recipients



From 20 March, 2020, JobSeeker replaced the Newstart Allowance as the main income support payment for people aged between 22 and the qualification age for the Age Pension.

Chart: Gareth Hutchens • Source: [Australian Government Department of Social Services](#) • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Now, a first-of-its-kind survey has found a sizeable majority of Australians would support the introduction of a universal basic income.

The survey was conducted by the research company YouGov, on behalf of the Green Institute, between October 14 and 18.

The Green Institute is the official think-tank of the Australian Greens. It is the equivalent of the Liberal Party's Menzies Research Institute and Labor's Chifley Institute.

Tim Hollo, the Green Institute's executive director, commissioned YouGov to run the question in one of its recent national surveys.

He said Australians had never been asked the question and he was interested to see the data.

The survey question, put to 1,026 Australians, was:

"Unconditional income support is sometimes called a Guaranteed Living Wage or a Universal Basic Income. This means that just as we can rely on basic health care and education, everyone in a society has a guaranteed minimum amount of money that they can rely on. Would you support or oppose a guaranteed living wage being introduced in Australia?"

The survey revealed:

- 29 per cent "strongly support" the idea
- 29 per cent "somewhat support" the idea (net support of 58 per cent)
- 8 per cent "strongly oppose" the idea
- 10 per cent "somewhat oppose" the idea (net opposition of 18 per cent)

- 19 per cent "neither support nor oppose" the idea
- 6 per cent "don't know"

The YouGov survey also asked another question for the Green Institute.

It said for every job advertised in Australia, there were at least 15 jobseekers (when the survey was taken in October).

"Given this information, to what extent do you agree or disagree that we should provide unconditional income support to those out of work (i.e. without the requirement to apply for a certain number of jobs or to complete a specified number of hours of designated work activities)?"

The survey revealed:

- 23 per cent "strongly agree"
- 27 per cent "somewhat agree" (net agreement of 50 per cent)
- 11 per cent "strongly disagree"
- 14 per cent "somewhat disagree" (net disagreement of 24 per cent)
- 20 per cent "neither agree nor disagree"
- 6 per cent "don't know"

Mr Hollo said the results were fascinating because support for UBI was "remarkably even" in Australia across demographic groups including gender, age, income and employment status, dropping below 50 per cent only in the highest age bracket (49 per cent support among people over 75 years old).

He said support for the idea was demonstrably higher in Victoria (65 per cent support; 13 per cent oppose) than in other states, which may reflect the state's protracted lockdown.

"It's always struck me that in politics more broadly, including from some people in the union movement, there's a strongly held opposition to the idea of UBI, but when I talk to people at barbecues or when I've been door-knocking, that kind of thing, the idea often comes up and people are really interested and excited by it," he told the ABC.

"There's this sort of suppression of the idea that goes on in our political conversation, but out there in the real world people have always kind of thought it makes sense."

## **Where does the universal basic income idea come from?**

The idea of a universal basic income is not new.

Five hundred years ago, Thomas More discussed the idea in his fictional work *Utopia* (1516), and generations of philosophers and economists and revolutionaries have proposed their own versions since.

Today, there are multiple pilot projects running in numerous countries hoping to understand how a UBI can redress persistent poverty and inequalities.

UBI advocates claim it can reduce or eliminate the bureaucracy around welfare and government work programs and, if set high enough, can provide everyone with a basic income to avoid poverty. They say people could choose to top up their UBI payment with paid work if they wanted, or they could live off the UBI while doing volunteer work, social and community activities, artistic pursuits or other unpaid work such as caring responsibilities.

## Growing interest in UBI

Roger Patulny, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Wollongong, and Ben Spies-Butcher, an associate professor of sociology at Macquarie University, have an interest in UBI.

Earlier this year they submitted questions to the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA), a nationwide nationally representative and weighted survey, on the topic of UBI because they also wanted to know how Australians felt about the policy idea.

However, the questions they submitted to the AuSSA were the same questions that had been asked in the European Social Survey on UBI because they wanted their data to be internationally comparable.

One question was quite specific, telling respondents what a UBI would mean in practice, including on the subject of taxes.

"A basic income includes all of the following — the government pays everyone a monthly income to cover essential living costs; it replaces many other social benefits; the purpose is to guarantee everyone a minimum standard of living; everyone receives the same amount regardless of whether or not they are working; people also keep the money they earn from work or other sources; this scheme is paid for by taxes.

"Overall, would you be against or in favour of having this scheme in Australia?"

They said their survey was run over the first half of this year, so it captured Australians' changing attitudes to UBI as the COVID shutdowns were introduced and prolonged.

They recently received the raw data from the survey and they're currently analysing it, in preparation for a journal article to be published next year, but the data seems to complement the Green Institute's YouGov survey, they said.

"The rate of support for UBI was probably around 43 to 45 per cent before COVID, and the YouGov survey has picked up a big jump in support," Mr Patulny told the ABC.

"That's a pretty decent set of evidence that COVID has brought about more interest and sympathy in the UBI."

## How would Australians spend their time?

Mr Patulny said the AuSSA survey (which needs to be analysed properly) also asked Australians what they would do with their time if they began receiving regular basic income payments.

Would they continue to work as much as before, or would they spend more time doing other things?

"Very roughly, about a third of people suggested they'd stick to their old routine, so if they're working full-time they'd continue to work full-time and if they're working part-time that's what they'd keep doing," Mr Patulny said.

"About 5 per cent said they'd spend more time working, which was surprising.

"About 15 per cent said they'd spend more time socialising with friends and/or family, or volunteering in community activities, and 11 per cent said they'd spend more time exercising like walking/hiking, or doing sports.

"Roughly 4 per cent nominated creative hobbies, so that includes art, writing, performance, dance, theatre, and media making like film and websites.

YOUTUBE: Elon Musk speaking about a universal basic income

"What that's telling us is what people really love to do, and want to do more of, is to get out and about physically and hang out with their mates, I mean that's the fun stuff, isn't it?"

## Back to reality

Mr Hollo from the Green Institute said apart from the question about UBI, the YouGov survey shows half of Australians feel there should not be any conditions on unemployment income support at the moment, at least while jobseekers outstrip the number of jobs available by a huge margin.

"At the beginning of the pandemic, 'mutual obligations' for income support were suspended, and their reintroduction is already causing great hardship, with payments suspended to 234,000 people, including 9,100 homeless people and over 12,000 First Nations people," Mr Hollo told the ABC.

"It's clear that Australians recognise that these conditions are pointless, and it's time to leave them in our past and move on together.

"The political conversation in Australia is built around an assumption that people like the surveillance-based welfare system that punishes and stigmatises people on income support.

"This poll should well and truly squash that assumption and open up space in Australian politics for a different path — a path that sees us looking out for each other, helping each other to find our feet, making sure nobody slips through the cracks."