



## LETTERS

## A UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

# Switzerland voted against a universal basic income

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Painter discusses the health benefits of a universal basic income (UBI).<sup>1</sup> With its long tradition of direct democracy, Switzerland was the first country to vote on the introduction of a UBI plan, only about six months ago.<sup>2</sup> In the preceding months and weeks the vote had stirred a broad public debate about the pros and cons of an idea that many citizens had not heard about before and must have found improbable at first. Most arguments were about the economic aspects, such as whether an unconditional SFr2500 (£2025 ;€2330 ; \$2495) a month for each adult (as suggested by the proponents) could possibly be funded by the state's tax revenue and what it might mean in terms of motivation of the workforce. There was little mention of the potential benefits and harms regarding overall wellbeing and health.

The proposal was rejected with 77% of the vote, which was not unexpected in a country that isn't well known for its avant garde

societal experiments. Conversely, this means that 23% (about 570 000 voters) were in favour of UBI and the radical change in the country's social welfare system that would have been inevitable with its introduction. It will be interesting to see whether the accumulating evidence from ongoing or new experiments such as those cited by Painter will inform future debates around UBI in Switzerland and elsewhere.

Competing interests: None declared.

- 1 Painter A. A universal basic income: the answer to poverty, insecurity, and health inequality? *BMJ* 2016;356:i6473. doi:10.1136/bmj.i6473 pmid:27956433.
- 2 Switzerland's voters reject basic income plan. *BBC* 2016 June 5. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36454060>.

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