

Canada Assistance Plan

I think I can best explain the distinction by reference to the categorical programs of old age assistance and blind and disabled persons allowances which employ the means test. Under these programs, the factors considered are the income of the recipient and his assets computed as income, the income ceilings that are built into the programs, and the maximum benefits which now are \$75 per month. If the needs of the recipient exceed the amounts that can be provided within these ceilings, there is no way of meeting them except through some other measure. Where the recipient has dependants, the problem is compounded since these programs were not designed to take adequate account of such additional needs.

Under a needs test, on the other hand, assistance payments can be related to the requirements of individuals and families. Several advantages are gained by this. The benefit provided can take into account the family size and composition and provide for any special needs that it may have, as well as the regularly recurring ones. At the same time, rates can continually be adjusted to reflect changes in the cost of living. The needs test approach implies the development and use of community budget studies as a means of relating assistance rates more closely to adequate living standards. Anyone who is aware of the great variations in rent charges as well as other budgetary items from one individual or family to another, as well as from one community to another across Canada, will appreciate the significance of this approach.

I would like to comment briefly on the provisions of the plan concerned with institutional care. The plan carries forward the coverage of welfare institutions or "homes for special care" that is now provided under the unemployment assistance program. The majority of these institutions are homes for the aged and nursing homes. While the number of persons who require care in such homes is comparatively small, the costs involved can be quite high, sometimes more than \$300 per month. The plan, in addition to basic care, will support special rehabilitative measures such as physiotherapy and occupational therapy undertaken as part of the institutional program.

Mr. Winkler: I do not wish to interrupt the minister's statement, but again I should like to have a point clarified. When the minister

refers to nursing homes, will this mean nursing homes accredited by provinces?

Mr. MacEachen: Yes, Mr. Speaker, in so far as I understand the situation, and I will be glad to clarify that point later.

In this connection, I should also refer to the fact that through the plan federal contributions may be made toward the cost of home care and similar services to persons in their own homes. This feature of the plan will help to reduce the pressure on welfare institutions and will enable many persons to remain in their own homes who would otherwise need institutional care.

Before leaving the definition of persons in need, I would like to refer to the provisions of the legislation as they relate to child welfare. Under the plan contributions will be made towards the costs of maintaining children who are the responsibility of child welfare authorities, and of foster children who are being assisted. Members will be aware that in some areas this support is provided through provincial departments of welfare, while in others it is the responsibility of children's aid societies. The costs covered will include all of those indicated in the definition of assistance, among them maintenance costs, any special needs that the children may have and costs of health care.

There has been a good deal of interest lately in the question of institutional care for children, particularly for the retarded and the emotionally disturbed. The bill covers institutions for children which are under welfare auspices and where the program emphasizes social rather than medical treatment services.

I come now to the provisions of the legislation that are concerned with welfare services. It is the intention that these provisions should be used to support a broadly based attack on the causes and effects of poverty, child neglect and dependence upon public assistance. In this way the plan can be given a preventive and rehabilitative emphasis that has been lacking in federal-provincial public assistance measures up to the present.

In discussing welfare services, I would like to comment particularly on some of the kinds of service that will be covered. An essential component will be rehabilitation services such as counselling, casework, assessment and referral designed to help those with family and social problems find solutions to them before they lead to family breakdown and dependence on public assistance. They will