

Witness groups (e.g. the Canadian Institute of Child Health, the Canadian Consumers' Association and the Canadian Dietetic Association) spoke of the importance of health promotion, particularly among young people, to produce behavioural changes, such as giving up tobacco products, alcohol and poor dietary habits, that will reduce risks to health.

The need to broaden the concept of health care to include social support services was also expressed in the context of children's health. For example, such services are regarded by many witnesses as essential in the fight against low birthweight in babies of low-income mothers.

The Committee was also reminded that the health status of Canada's aboriginal children is lower than that of Canadian children in general. In 1986, for example, infant mortality for status Indians was still twice that of the Canadian population (17 per 1,000 for Indians compared to 8 per 1,000 for Canada).⁹⁶ Similarly, the Native Council of Canada informed the Committee that rates of postnatal mortality, fetal alcohol syndrome, suicide (particularly among young people 15-24 years of age), and violent deaths are much higher among aboriginal people than in the Canadian population as a whole.⁹⁷

It seems self evident that the health of children should be a priority in health care policy and planning. Children represent the future of Canada and research and practice suggest that if people begin their lives in good health the risk of illness and disability in later life is greatly reduced. Healthier people would presumably have a positive impact on the cost of health care and make for a generally more productive society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 19. That the federal government take an interdepartmental approach to develop a strategy to reduce the threat posed by poverty to the health of children and youth.**
- 20. That a federal-provincial interdepartmental advisory committee be established to develop strategies to change behaviour, (e.g. avoiding use of tobacco products, alcohol, and poor eating habits) thereby reducing risk factors associated with poor health in children and youth (e.g. low birthweight and fetal alcohol syndrome).**
- 21. That the promotion and advertising of tobacco products be phased out as soon as reasonably possible.**

⁹⁶ Hagey et al., *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁹⁷ Brief, pp. 1-2.