

## Canada at world health meeting

The Canadian government, recognizing that health and socio-economic development are linked, has focused its social policy on the elimination of poverty and the promotion of economic development, said Health and Welfare Minister Monique Bégin in an address to the thirty-fourth World Health Assembly held in Geneva, May 4-22.

Miss Bégin, who led the Canadian delegation to the meeting, told delegates that in Canada "problems of urban poverty are a growing challenge" because more people are migrating to large cities in search of employment. The minister said that the health of Canada's Indians and Inuit peoples, many of whom live in isolated northern communities, must also be a high priority because they experience a high incidence of gastroenteritis, respiratory disease, alcoholism and accidental death. The Canadian government is encouraging greater participation by native people in developing economic and health programs directed to them, said the minister.

### Preventive measures

Miss Bégin said that in order to deal with modern health problems greater priority has to be given to preventive measures relating to the environment and to public information and education. Traffic accidents, heart disease, lung cancer and breast cancer cause a large number of deaths in Canada, said Miss Bégin. Drinking, smoking, poor eating habits, stress and lack of proper exercise are also singly, or in combination major causes of death, she added.

"...These killers could be held in check to a greater or lesser degree by a change in lifestyle. I am convinced that the greatest challenge facing the health professions today is to convince the public to change habits and behaviours that shorten lives and affect health," said Miss Bégin. In Canada there are a number of federal and provincial programs directed specifically to some of these problems: "Dialogue on Drinking", "Operation Lifestyle", "Participation", and "Canada's Food Guide". In addition, the federal government recently started a program to dissuade youth from smoking and a nutrition program called "Balance".

The minister said that the World Health Organization's "Health for all by



*Health Minister Monique Bégin*

the year 2000" program will involve "concerted action" by Canada's federal and provincial governments. Although the provinces have the primary responsibility for health services, both levels of government have roles to play in health promotion, protection and prevention, and research and financing of health systems, said Miss Bégin. "The WHO strategy provides us with an excellent blueprint for this co-operative action," she added.

The WHO program "provides uniquely for co-operation among all countries, developed and developing", said the minister. "The sharing of experience is perhaps the most important form this co-operation will take, but certain countries — the least developed — require the support of the international community if they are to put their own scarce resources to best use," Miss Bégin added.

Canada spent 7.1 per cent of its gross national product on health, said Miss Bégin. She said that rather than using resources almost exclusively on treatment facilities and technological expertise, there is a greater need today for the development of: community health, with particular emphasis on individual involvement; care of the aged and infirm; and health promotion and prevention. "There are within the spectrum of health care possibilities an optimum combination of treatment and prevention for each country," she added.

### Breastfeeding

In addition, the minister reaffirmed Canada's commitment to breastfeeding. Canada was one of the 118 countries at the meeting in Geneva that voted in favour of

the International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes.

Federal and provincial health authorities in Canada have been working in conjunction with professional and other non-governmental organizations to develop and implement breastfeeding promotion programs. The results indicate that the percentage of infants being breastfed has, during the last ten years, increased nationally from a low of about 40 per cent to nearly 60 per cent. These Canadian programs are consistent with the general thrust of the code and contain some of the measures outlined in the code.

## University hiring policy changes

Universities will be required to advertise for Canadian candidates and evaluate their suitability before seeking foreign academics for post-secondary teaching positions in Canada, according to new policy changes announced by Employment and Immigration Minister Lloyd Axworthy.

"Although the present policy was designed to ensure that foreign academics were not admitted for teaching jobs until the vacancies had been brought to the attention of Canadian citizens and permanent residents, universities were permitted to advertise for applicants from other countries at the same time as they were advertising in Canada. The decision to determine the availability of Canadians first will strengthen our policy of ensuring that people already living in Canada have a chance to compete for these jobs before anyone from abroad is considered," said Mr. Axworthy.

Mr. Axworthy said he has informed the provincial governments of the policy changes and that he is prepared to work with individual provinces, or jointly with them, to ensure that qualified Canadians receive prior consideration in the filling of academic positions.

Since the present policy was introduced in 1977, about one-quarter of all teaching personnel employed by Canadian universities has been filled by non-Canadians.

"Because of the large number of post-graduates now leaving our universities each year, I feel it is only fair that we find out if there are qualified candidates available on the Canadian market before advertising abroad," the minister added.