

across Canada, and in the interest of promoting national unity through avoiding extremes in income disparities, national minimums should be set by the Parliament of Canada in the levels of the allowances and income guarantees involved in the country's income security system.<sup>30</sup>

It is the view of the Task Force that reducing interprovincial variation in levels of social assistance and encouraging the development of national minimum standards, taking into account differences in the cost of living, should be an objective of the federal government. This objective will give expression and meaning to Canadian unity. There are several mechanisms through which this objective could be achieved.

In the long run, the federal government itself might assume greater responsibility for many of those now assisted through provincial programs. This has already occurred to some extent through the universal Family Allowance, the Refundable Child Tax Credit and other national programs. If at some time national anti-poverty programs (such as income support/supplementation) were developed further, these would in themselves reduce interprovincial variation (just as has occurred for those 65 and over). Other methods may include 'front-end loading' where higher levels of cost-sharing are offered up a minimum level of social assistance, or simply a federal-provincial agreement on minimum standards.

The Task Force recognizes that this is properly a subject of federal-provincial negotiation and leaves the selection of a specific mechanism to that forum. Of course, as previously discussed, any mechanism must ensure that provinces with greater needs are not required to bear a disproportionate burden.

With respect to interprovincial variation in social services, members' views depend generally upon their preference for continued cost-sharing, block-funding or tax-transfer. Those who favour cost-sharing argue that the federal government should take an active role in encouraging reduction in interprovincial variation and achieving national minimums in social services as well as in social assistance. Those who prefer block-funding or tax transfers would leave the choice of levels of service up to each province. But all members look forward

to a time when the funding available to provinces for social services becomes more equal on a per capita basis.

## Federal Leadership

The importance of federal leadership in the past, particularly through the CAP, was stressed by social organizations. In its brief, the National Council of Welfare described the contribution of the federal government, through CAP, to the development of Canada's social security system:

Since its inception in 1966 as a major strategy in the federal government's war on poverty, the Canada Assistance Plan has played an important part in the expansion of provincial social security systems, especially in economically disadvantaged provinces and areas within provinces. Federal dollars and technical assistance helped expand the range and quality of social services such as case-work, counselling, assessment and referral, day care, homemaker services and child welfare. The elderly, disabled, and poor families and children have benefited from social service programs.

CAP also made a marked improvement in provincial social assistance ("welfare") programs. It enabled most provinces to consolidate and rationalize various provincial and municipal income maintenance programs into a single uniform plan. CAP required the development of provincial appeal procedures for dissatisfied welfare recipients and abolished residency requirements for social assistance.<sup>24</sup>

Aside from day-to-day consultation and negotiation on cost-sharing matters, federal leadership may also play a role in special areas requiring development. The recent National Pension Conference and the National Day Care Information Centre are examples of federal initiatives in areas of federal and provincial concern. Fiscal arrangements may provide another important avenue for the federal government to exert influence in areas of particular concern. For example, both of the proposed bills relating to social services mentioned earlier in this chapter included a special fund for capital expenditures by the provinces on rehabilitation facilities. Similar to the Health Resources Fund, which is now almost fully utilized, this fund would have given provinces a strong incentive to develop more fully their capital facilities required for rehabilitation of the disabled.