

*Canada Assistance Plan*

through the plan, will result in the development and maintenance of high standards. On the basis of our discussions with the provinces, I am confident that they subscribe fully to these objectives.

Hon. members may raise the question of standards as they relate to the role of municipalities in the plan. I would point out also that the assistance programs shareable under the plan are increasingly carried directly by provincial departments of welfare and in some provinces, including Ontario, steps are being taken to group smaller municipalities into larger units for the administration of welfare programs. The plan will make funds available to improve the staffs in municipal as well as provincial welfare departments.

Hon. members may have noticed the reference recently to the measures being introduced in the Ontario legislature by Hon. Louis Cecile, the minister of public welfare, in anticipation of the enactment of the Canada Assistance Plan. A number of these provide for more generous sharing with the municipalities in the costs of welfare programs. With federal funds assisting for the first time in staff improvements and also being used to relieve municipalities of some of the onerous costs of welfare, we have every reason to expect that those needing assistance will have their needs met with the dignity and impartiality that are the marks of a good social assistance program.

● (9:30 p.m.)

In addition to the basic requirements referred to earlier, the legislation will support the provision of other benefits as they are required. I might mention particularly items of special need, and items incidental to carrying on a trade or other employment. The latter provision illustrates the rehabilitative approach of the plan. This rehabilitative emphasis is also evident in its coverage of welfare services, such as family counselling or homemakers services. The inclusion of provisions of this kind adds flexibility to the plan and raises it above traditional assistance programs which tend to have been limited to minimal aid. The plan will be available to meet need as it occurs and will support the provision of assistance in a manner and in amounts calculated to help overcome the problems that led in the first instance to the need for assistance.

I would also like to make particular reference to the coverage of health care services.

[Mr. MacEachen.]

This may include a comprehensive range of services such as medical and surgical care, dental, optical and nursing services, and drugs. This is important, not only as part of the rehabilitative emphasis of the plan, but also for persons who may need long-term income support because of age or disability.

The definition of "persons in need" in the legislation indicates its coverage in so far as the provision of assistance is concerned. The definition identifies the major causes that require persons to turn to some means of public support by referring to inability to obtain employment, loss of the principal family provider, illness, disability and age. The reference to unemployment carries forward a major portion of the unemployment assistance program, while the loss of the family provider incorporates coverage of mothers' allowances paid, among others, to widows and deserted mothers.

Hon. members will be aware of the concern that has been expressed in this house over the years concerning the test of permanent and total disability under the disabled persons program; this was referred to in the debate just the other day. The references to illness and disability in this definition will extend coverage to any person who, because of disablement of any kind or extent, is unable to support himself and his dependants. This will remove the necessity of meeting the medical test of total and permanent disability that now is required under the Disabled Persons Act.

**Mr. Winkler:** Mr. Speaker, may I ask the minister who the authority will be to make that determination?

**Mr. MacEachen:** The authority will, of course, be a provincial administration which determines that a person is in need, and this will be applied not as now, in the form of what many hon. members have regarded as a rigid medical test.

The definition also provides for the determination of eligibility on the basis of a needs test, which is a test that takes into account budgetary requirements as well as resources. There have been suggestions by some hon. members that the reference to a needs test as opposed to a means test in determining eligibility for assistance is simply a question of semantics. I would like to emphasize that the distinction is, in fact, a real and important one.