

There is no reason to believe that Canada's Indians cannot become healthy and productive members of the Canadian community. We must first free them from servitude to ill-health, and then lead them gradually into the full current of Canadian citizenship. For success in our health endeavours we count above all on their own willing co-operation, which almost always is cheerfully given. A recent important advance towards making Indians self-sufficient was their inclusion in common with all citizens of that province, in the British Columbia hospital insurance plan.

We honour what the Indians have done in the past for Canada. In recent years many of them have risen to positions of responsibility. Many have served with distinction in the Armed Forces. Given a fair chance, Canada's Indians can bring sterling attributes of resourcefulness, courage and commonsense as their contribution to our national character.

As we look forward to what we can do in this field, we can take encouragement from the striking progress made in recent years. In part because of new health services established, the decline in our native population was checked in the 1920's. Since then, the number of Indians has steadily increased. It now approximates 130,000 as against 125,700 some six years ago. In addition, two or three thousand Indians in this short period have abandoned their tribal status to become enfranchised as Canadian citizens.

THE FIGHT AGAINST TUBERCULOSIS

The great scourge of the Indian is tuberculosis. The death toll fifty years ago from this disease was appallingly high. It is still far too high but it is being rapidly cut down. Energetic attacks are being made on this scourge. Every modern technique is being used. There are nine times as many Indian patients receiving needed hospital care for tuberculosis today as there were nine years ago. It is no wonder, therefore, that since 1944, the tuberculosis death rate has been reduced by 40 per cent or more.

Our doctors and nurses regularly journey into the north, into the remote parts of Canada, in search of those suffering from tuberculosis. An important part of our preventive program is the use of B.C.G. vaccine for young children, which gives them a much better chance to escape infection.

A truly outstanding achievement - and one that is a good gauge of the quality of our health workers in the field -- is that almost 75 per cent of Canada's entire native population was given a chest X-ray in 1949. In the Sioux Lookout Agency the figure reached 90 per cent. Our goal is now to check every individual, no matter how remote, at least once every two years.

Tuberculosis among Indians and Eskimos is being brought under control. In addition, full-scale efforts are being made to prevent other communicable diseases such as diphtheria, whooping cough, smallpox, and typhoid-like diseases. Against these diseases our native population gets at least as good protection as that given any group in Canada. The story of Indian Health Services is one of constant, unrelenting effort. It is the story of frequent emergencies and strenuous counter-measures. In recent years, for example,