

CHILDREN'S BENEFITS RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

The Consultation Paper recommends immediate increases in the flat-rate benefit for dependent children of deceased contributors. This recommendation received enthusiastic support from most of the witnesses to appear before the Committee. The Committee, too, supports the principle of higher survivors' benefits for dependent children of contributors.

Many witnesses before the Committee, however, addressed the difficulties faced by spouses with dependent children to adjust to the loss of the contributor's income. The issue of continuing support for dependent children was tied by many witnesses to the need for increased and continuing support for the surviving parent of these dependents. The National Council of Women of Canada, for example, told the Committee of the labour force difficulties faced by most women with children who must fulfill two roles, those of earner and homemaker:

A shift to a two-earner family does not alter the fact that most women maintain the primary responsibility for nurturing children and for operating the household... This restricts job opportunities... 1.8 million Canadians work part time, and of those, about 700,000 or 800,000 are working part time for family reasons.

The Standing Committee agrees with the many witnesses who argued in favour of higher survivors' benefits for the dependent children of deceased contributors. Indeed, the importance of providing Canadian workers' families with financial protection in the event of death is central to the CPP. In view of this, and in view of the difficulty faced by surviving spouses with dependent children, the Committee also supports further enhancement of children's survivor benefits to target those survivors who must support dependent children.

Widows (who may or may not be in receipt of survivors' benefits) are more likely to face economic hardship than non-widows of the same age. Data provided by Statistics Canada show widows of all ages more likely to be unemployed or employed part-time. The economic hardships faced by pre-retirement age widows are compounded by the presence of dependent children, as can be seen in Table 6. While widows are more likely to receive social assistance than non-widows, one out of every four widows with dependent children receive welfare assistance.