



## **FAMILIES**

Societal changes affecting the family have had an impact on the development of programs in the field of maternal and child care and support to youth. Since the turn of the century, Canadian families have undergone dramatic changes. The interdependent and largely self-sufficient family is now a thing of the past. In today's industrialized, overwhelmingly urbanized and mobile society, the typical family has not only become much smaller but has radically altered in other respects as well. For example, less than 14 percent of Canadian families now conform to the traditional pattern of two parents and one breadwinner. In more than 60 percent of two-parent families, both parents work outside the home. The number of single-parent families is on the rise (now 13 percent) and most of these are headed by women. Of women with children under the age of six, 58 percent are in the labour force. One half of all divorces involve families with children, while the rate of marriage continues to decline with a corresponding increase in common-law unions.

Family violence is a matter of great contemporary concern. Violence or abuse, whether it be physical, sexual, psychological or financial, affects all groups, but women, children and seniors are particularly vulnerable. It is being increasingly recognized that adolescents are also a high-risk group. The first federal initiative to address family violence, taken in 1988, concentrated on raising awareness of the need for preventive measures, and the creation of more effective protection and treatment services for victims.

A second four-year initiative was launched in 1991 to mobilize individuals and communities to prevent violence and, by forming partnerships, to improve the capacity of the health, social service, and justice systems to help victims and stop offenders. It also focusses on establishing shelters for abused women; sharing resources and knowledge; and creating a database on the extent of violence. Special attention is being devoted to the needs of those most vulnerable, or those for whom services are less accessible, including the disabled, minority groups, aboriginal people, and people living in remote and rural areas. The costs of many of the services involved in these projects are shared by the federal and provincial governments through the Canada Assistance Plan, which also funds foster homes and special-care establishments such as shelters for the victims of family violence and rape crisis centres. In 1993, the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women released its findings and made recommendations for action.

An example of provincial efforts in this area is the Wife Assault Prevention Initiative and the Sexual Assault Prevention Initiative coordinated by the Ontario Women's Directorate. At present, the two initiatives fund 68 programs in nine ministries. The initiatives deliver programs in three areas - services, public education, and prevention and justice. Currently, the Government of Ontario is reviewing the two initiatives with a view to integrating them into a Violence Against Women Prevention Strategy that will address this issue in a coordinated, accountable and accessible manner.