

public interest, recommending what policies and safeguards should be applied." The Commission's work had two main components: firstly, the gathering of information and consulting about the issues surrounding reproductive technologies and, secondly, research and evaluation. Its report, which was published late in 1993, provides interested Canadians and their governments with an ample base of information and analysis for further consideration of the important questions involved.

The concerns surrounding reproductive technology are not confined to the care and treatment of the estimated 7 - 10% of Canadians unable to conceive and bear children when they wish. The causes of infertility are sometimes known and can be prevented — in cases, for example, resulting from sexually transmitted diseases. Generally Canadian reproductive health indicators reflect a high standard of care and access to services. However, statistics for sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancies indicate that there are significant gaps in addressing healthy sexuality in certain populations such as adolescents, isolated individuals and aboriginal people.

Awareness is growing that environmental and workplace hazards affect reproductive health in both men and women. Although it is known that the reproductive

system is sensitive to the toxic effects of hazardous chemicals, very few chemicals have been adequately studied in this regard. More research is required to assess the specific impact of potential hazards on reproductive health. More research is also needed to evaluate the effects of combinations of chemicals over the long term, taking into account individual biological make-up and lifestyle.

The federal government seeks to provide leadership and expertise by acting as a catalyst to promote co-operation among governments, professional groups, health-care organizations and the voluntary sector. Recent initiatives in the field of reproductive and sexual health include the development of sexual health education guidelines, as well as the distribution of publications on sexually transmitted diseases, adolescent reproductive health, and guidelines to prevent child abuse.

In addition, a federal/provincial/territorial advisory committee on population health has recently been established to advise the Conference of Deputy Ministers of Health on national and interprovincial strategies that should be pursued to improve the health status of the Canadian population, and to encourage a more integrated approach to health programs.