

Canada Assistance Plan

This government and others of this party have clearly demonstrated their commitment to the continuing development of universal flat-rate benefit programs and social insurance measures. I need only refer to the record of previous Liberal governments in introducing programs such as family allowances, old age security, unemployment insurance and hospital insurance.

Since coming to office, this government has shown its determination to improve Canada's social security programs. Within the past three years, youth allowances have been implemented and the Canada Pension Plan has been introduced. Expenditures on old age security have been increased from \$755 million in 1963-64 to \$1,035 million in this fiscal year—an increase of \$280 million or 37 per cent in expenditures. This has been the result of improvements in the rate of benefits and the extension of protection to another 100,000 persons heretofore not covered. Before you now is a health resources fund bill, and within a few days you will have the bill for a medicare program.

Thus, while narrowing the scope of need to be met by public assistance, we are taking positive action to improve assistance and welfare service programs through the legislation before you.

I have already referred to the support and endorsement of the plan that has been given by the provinces and to one example—that of Ontario—of steps being taken by provinces in anticipation of this legislation. I could cite many other examples of such action. Newfoundland increased its social assistance rates some months ago in the knowledge that the plan was being developed, and new social assistance acts that will provide for more generous assistance on the basis of need have been enacted by the legislatures of Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Quebec has introduced a program to provide physicians' services for assistance recipients and has increased its mothers' allowance rates.

The measures being introduced in Ontario include family benefits legislation to provide assistance on an integrated basis as proposed under the plan. Saskatchewan adopted a comprehensive assistance plan on April 1, 1966 and has increased assistance rates. The province of Alberta has adopted legislation for the purpose of encouraging the development of preventive welfare services in the community.

[Mr. MacEachen.]

These are specific indications that the federal commitment to introduce the Canada Assistance Plan has already resulted in action to improve assistance and welfare service programs. They are also indicative of the value of close federal-provincial consultation in planning in the field of social programs.

I think it would be appropriate for me, in closing, to refer to the public support that has been given to the plan. It has been warmly received by the Canadian Welfare Council and its associated body, the Canadian Public Welfare Association, which have stated that they "are pleased to see that Canada is on the threshold of a necessary step in the development of its social security system". A similar view has been expressed by the Canadian Labour Congress, and perhaps I could quote briefly from its memorandum to the federal government, presented in February of this year.

It said:

We welcome the advent of the Canada Assistance Plan. We consider it to be an improvement over the categorical assistance programs now in effect. We agree that the change from a means-tested benefit, however subtle the difference may seem, will provide greater opportunities to provide an adequate benefit to those who will require assistance. We commend you for your decision to share with the provinces in the costs of allowances for needy mothers and medical care for the indigent, as well as the cost of improving administrative standards and of strengthening those rehabilitative services which will help to restore social assistance beneficiaries to a position where they are self-supporting.

In asking for the support of the house for second reading of the bill, may I express my confidence that it will bring about the development of welfare programs across Canada that are humane, effective and have a positive emphasis.

Mr. Douglas: May I ask the minister to clarify a point with reference to provinces which provide health services for categories such as the recipients of old age assistance and mothers' allowances who, because they are in those groups, are automatically in need. Will this legislation now make it possible for the federal government to share the cost of those programs in its entirety or will it deal only with each individual case?

Mr. MacEachen: I am not sure whether I understand the question put by the hon. member, but it is proposed that the federal government will share in the whole range of medical services for any person in receipt of assistance on the basis of need.