

social welfare which constitute the main elements of implicit population policies. A possible exception to this general absence of an explicit overarching approach to demographic issues should be noted in the case of Quebec. With its seven million people, Quebec represents one-quarter of Canada's population. As a province, desiring to preserve its linguistic uniqueness, Quebec has always placed demography among its chief concerns. While the rest of Canada's population is 80 percent English-speaking, Quebec's is 82 percent French-speaking. In addition, 85 percent of Canada's Francophones live in Quebec. As North America's only Francophone society, Quebec has always viewed demography as central to its concerns as it has sought to preserve its relative importance within Canada. Its governments have adopted specific policies concerning families and immigration that are quite different from the other provinces.

On the basis of the size of its economy and average income per capita, Canada ranks among the most prosperous of the world's developed countries. National statistics, however, mask sharp regional disparities in wealth and employment opportunities. A crucial challenge of Canadian federalism is the alleviation of regional inequities through fiscal policies and economic programs aimed at assisting the less prosperous provinces.

A similar observation applies in the health field. Canada enjoys a well-founded reputation for the outstanding

quality of its health-care system, in terms both of professional standards and accessibility. On a national basis, its record in reducing maternal and infant mortality is exemplary. Nevertheless, the situation can certainly not be described as universally satisfactory. Access to health services is often a problem for those residing far from major centres, especially for native people living in remote settlements. Among aboriginal people, life expectancy rates, although improving, fall short of national levels. And the same holds true to a lesser degree among lower-income groups generally, where there is a special requirement for disease-prevention programs and services geared to fostering healthy living habits. The challenges involved in adequately addressing the interrelationships between ill health and poverty are among the most important confronting Canada today.

Many of the programs outlined in the following pages are currently the subject of comprehensive reviews and public consultation processes as announced by the federal government early in 1994. These include income-security programs, the health-care system and immigration. In addition, Canada has embarked on a thorough foreign-policy and defence review, including foreign-aid policy. As reflected in this report, several provinces provided information on their programs and initiatives. As well, it should be noted that several provincial governments have begun reviews of their social programs.

