

For many generations far too little was done for the health care of our native population, which had to rely on such aid as could be given them through the charity of missionaries, explorers, fur-traders and soldiers, as well as friendly settlers in their neighbourhood.

Nearly 200 years ago, orders were given that Army surgeons should advise and attend sick Indians in their vicinity. During the 19th century, doctors were appointed for a few of the larger Indian communities, and at the time of Confederation, physicians and hospitals were made available in tribal areas on a very limited scale. In 1877, the Federal Government appointed a resident medical director for the Canadian West who was charged with vaccinating the entire population against the recurrent scourge of smallpox.

It was not until 1905 that the Federal Government established a regular service to care for the health of Indians and Eskimos, but by 1910 this too had become disorganized. In 1922 a few field nurses were appointed, and finally, in 1927, the effective federal organization of today was brought into being.

After some years of development, much retarded during the depression, the Indian Health Services Directorate in 1945 became part of the new Department of National Health and Welfare. Its expenditures today are ten times what they were in 1935 - and the results achieved have increased accordingly.

ORGANIZING THE INDIAN HEALTH CAMPAIGN

Let us consider the vast extent of our problem. Scattered across Canada from the Atlantic to the Pacific and north to the Arctic Circle and beyond there are some 130,000 Indians and 8,000 Eskimos. It would be comparatively simple to provide health care for these tribes and families if they all resided in the same area. Our major difficulty is the inaccessibility of those we are trying to help. Ordinary methods of organization would not match the magnitude of our Indian Health Services task. That is why we think of it as a continuing campaign, constantly being waged against our mutual enemies - disease, malnutrition, ill-health - wherever they threaten our native population.

To discharge, on behalf of the people of Canada, this voluntarily accepted responsibility for the health of our Indians and Eskimos, we have a trained staff of 1,000 in Indian Health Services, including 60 medical officers, 5 dental surgeons, 65 graduate nurses in the field and 125 nurses in departmental hospitals. Under the leadership of the Director, Dr. Percy Moore, who has the rich experience of almost 20 years of continuous and distinguished service in this field, we have mobilized these forces under regional superintendents in eight districts across Canada. The Ontario region, for example, is concerned with the health of some 33,000 Indians.

In reserve, we have some 900 doctors and dentists, besides hundreds of provincial health officers and visiting nurses, who serve part-time in this great endeavour. We also call on hundreds of hospitals and sanatoria, including our foremost institutions, and the leading members of the medical profession to provide Indian patients who require it with the best specialized hospital, medical and surgical care available in this country.