

drafting his motion, if he had taken care to consider the way through which provincial governments have exercised their right of option under the Medicare plan, including what relates to methods of financing provincial plans, he would have found immediately to what extent this part of his motion is unnecessary since certain provincial plans do not require contributions from the insured. Partial or total assistance is required to pay for these contributions in the case of those insured whose income is low, only in provinces where the payment of contributions is required.

Quebec and the Maritime Provinces, for instance, do not finance their health insurance plans through premiums. I therefore take it that the hon. member was referring only to the situation which prevails in Ontario and was not taking into account the funding system of the other provinces when he drafted his motion. In fact, Ontario does not participate in Medicare: hers is more of a prepaid medical insurance plan and I hope that some day it will be possible to put things in order with regard to the famous OHSIP.

When the government passed the Canada Assistance Act in 1966, it was meant to be an important step in the organization of a complete social assistance scheme designed to complement other income security measures. As everyone knows, the Canada Assistance Plan provides for agreements with the provinces, under which the federal government pays 50 per cent of the costs of assistance granted by the provinces to persons in need.

Under this plan, the federal government agrees to share the costs incurred by the provinces for the care given to needy Canadians, when such expenses are not already covered by other cost-sharing programs, such as the Hospital Insurance and Diagnostic Services Plan established in 1958 and the Medical Care Plan adopted in 1968.

Services which the federal government will recognize under the Canada Assistance Plan are varied and may include nursing, optical, dental, pharmaceutical, orthopedic care and others. The federal government reimburses the provinces and municipalities for 50 per cent of such services. The sharing, if it occurs, of the other 50 per cent of the costs of such services is provided for under a provincial act applicable to a province and to a municipality in this matter.

● (5:40 p.m.)

The only condition imposed on provinces for providing such services under the Canada Assistance Plan is this: those services must be provided according to the needs of the individuals after their financial obligations, their income and their resources have been assessed.

However I must stress the fact that it is entirely up to a province to decide whether the reimbursement of drugs will be included or not in a provincial assistance plan under the Canada Assistance Plan.

I might say also that in a province like Ontario, where municipalities play an important part in providing welfare services, it is up to them to decide whether they will help the interested people to buy drugs.

Drug Costs to Welfare Recipients

I think that this is the key to the problem. Provinces and municipalities have forgotten the high cost of drugs, while they were aware of the existence of a fund from which they could draw money in order to pay for half the cost of drugs which were most needed.

As for the problems mentioned by the hon. member, it is certain that if an individual falls ill, he needs medicine because what can a doctor do if it is impossible for him not only to nurse his patient but also to prescribe the necessary drugs to cure him? There again, the provinces, which are very jealous of their jurisdictions, be able to draw upon funds made available to them.

The Canada Assistance Plan, as someone said a moment ago, recognizes the primacy of the provinces' constitutional responsibility in respect of welfare, by giving them the margin of decision mentioned above as far as the extent of care that provincial assistance plans can guarantee. It does not disregard the daily difficulties which low income families have to face when they must, for instance, pay a high price for drugs. If a provincial government wishes it, it may decree that some families need help in a special field, as that of large purchases of drugs, and if the assistance provided for is based on the assessment of needs, pursuant to the agreement signed by the federal and the interested provincial governments, and as is required by this program, the federal government will reimburse the provincial government 50 per cent of the cost of drugs supplied.

In other words, a provincial government is entitled to include in its financial assistance program the cost of drugs according to an assessment of needs without beneficiaries receiving any other type of social assistance. However, by and large, the provinces usually only supply drugs, under their own social assistance plans, to needy persons already receiving some other form of social assistance.

All the provinces have signed agreements with the federal government under the Canada Assistance Plan. For instance, the Quebec Public Assistance Plan has been recognized by the law on cost-sharing arrangements and temporary agreements. However, I must emphasize that responsibility for the establishment of provincial plans rests with each province. It is assumed that provincial governments are sufficiently aware of the needs of their citizens in this field.

I therefore consider that the federal government is making an ample contribution by undertaking, under the Canada Assistance Plan, to reimburse up to 50 per cent of the cost of drugs that certain individuals may require, based on an assessment of treatment. I would add that it can go no further than this and that it is up to the provinces to make their own decision as to whether they want to avail themselves of the opportunities offered through this federal financial assistance.

Because of the provisions of the Canada Assistance Plan, I have pointed out how they applied to the subject matter which we are now discussing. I believe that the first part of the hon. member's motion to the effect that in the opinion of this House the government should