

greater obligation than to work together with an uncompromising commitment to universal access to essential medical services of high quality.

Our two countries also face the challenge of adapting to an ageing population, to ensure that adequate health care is provided and to examine related issues such as maintaining public pension plans, home care and creating the conditions in which health and social services can adjust and respond to the evolving needs of the aging population.

The third topic of this symposium relates to work and family the difficult challenge of balancing these responsibilities. In Canada, government efforts to aid families in creating such a balance include, for example, a major new initiative to double parental leave from 26 weeks to a full year to enable working parents to choose to be with their young children.

In this globalizing era, it will be a challenge for us to not only make it easier for citizens to balance work and family but to also recognize our corporate social responsibility of ensuring that our citizens are not left out of the workforce.

#### **4. ENVISIONING SOCIAL POLICY WITH A FUTURE PERSPECTIVE**

Finally, I would like to discuss our ability to envision social policy with a future perspective, particularly in the context of the knowledge-based economy.

The world economy is becoming increasingly knowledge-based. This transition holds the prospect of improved performance, but introduces a new set of transition problems. In order to adapt, the challenge will be to upgrade the skills and education of its workforce and make the management of knowledge a priority for individuals, firms, governments and other institutions.

The knowledge-based economy also holds unique challenges for women. Women have much to offer the knowledge-based economy and society, given the evidence of the nature and scope of their participation in it. Our priority is to ensure that we are bringing women's perspectives to policymaking and related research.

Technological change and the information revolution are among the most important determinants of economic growth, human development and social cohesion. The promise and pressures of the information society will continue to be a challenging factor for us in this globalizing era. The government of Canada seeks to address this challenge by committing to have its services on-line by 2004 so that citizens will be able to access its services at a time and place of their choosing.

I believe it is important to see that social policy and economic policy work hand in hand, understanding the interdependency between the two. The society and the economy have to be seen as a reciprocating engine, where economic growth reinforces social cohesion and where social cohesion contributes to economic growth.

A strong economy is necessary for us to improve the quality of life of our citizens, preventing growing inequality and improving social cohesion.

Research is needed to help us understand the impact that the global economy is having and will continue to have on social policy.