

enhancing the employability of their clientele. It is important, therefore, that we experiment with ways of doing this and test their efficacy through actual pilot projects in the field. Specific proposals for the use of innovations program funds will be ready by the end of the year, based on discussions among my officials, those of my colleague and those of provincial and territorial Ministries.

Before going on to areas dealing with my Department, I would like to give a special note of thanks to my colleague, the Minister of Employment and Immigration, because of the work that she has done with the provinces and the Territories and the negotiations that she has undertaken almost from the very first day this Government took office. It is work that is starting to show results, and I commend her for that today.

● (1510)

The Minister of Employment and Immigration is not in the House at this point because she is in my home province participating with the provincial Government of Manitoba on a further job-creation program, namely the Limestone Program. That is the reason that rather than being in the House of Commons, she is in an important place like my home province, to work further with the provinces.

Mr. Frith: She should be in Sudbury.

Mr. Epp (Provencher): The rest of the points refer to one of the most important programs of my Department, the Canada Assistance Plan. This is the program that supports Canada's social safety net by sharing with the provinces the cost of Canada's network of social assistance and social services. Since its inception in 1967, the Canada Assistance Plan or CAP has fulfilled its mandate to provide financial assistance and social services to Canadians who are in need. Our review of the program has shown that however well it may be fulfilling its basic task of maintaining persons who are on social assistance it does not give us all the tools necessary to assist those persons in getting off social assistance and into stable, rewarding, long-term employment.

The new approaches outlined in this agreement will go a long way toward making CAP a program that not only assists people but helps them develop the skills and experience to assist themselves. The first of these new approaches involves the question of disincentives. These vary from province to province, but we have discovered that the guidelines of the program have sometimes worked to make work or training less attractive than remaining on social assistance. A primary example of these disincentives was the requirement to deduct 100 per cent of all training allowances from welfare cheques. These allowances, which were designed to help meet the additional expenditures involved in following a training course and to serve as an incentive for people considering taking such courses, meant nothing to social assistance recipients because for each dollar of training allowance they received they lost a dollar of social assistance. Under this agreement, that will not be the case.

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Another example is the non-cash benefits that are often so important to persons on social assistance, such as free prescription drugs, medicare premiums, dental care, eyeglasses, just to name some. These usually stopped as soon as a person took a job or entered a training course. This was often a major disincentive. Under this new agreement, provinces will be able to eliminate this disincentive and still maintain cost sharing under CAP.

The second new approach involving the Canada Assistance Plan is one that I consider a major improvement in our ability to use the money now being spent for social assistance in a positive fashion to permit Canadians on social assistance to assist themselves. This is so important that I would like to read point 5 of our agreement, with the indulgence of the House:

In addition to item 1 above—

—that is the one to negotiate the bilateral agreements between the provinces, the Territories, and the federal Government.

—to expand opportunities for social assistance recipients to participate in training and employment by permitting provinces, who wish to do so, to refer social assistance recipients to Canada Jobs Strategy programs or similar provincial programs, and also to transfer to those programs those funds that the provinces would have spent on social assistance payments to those programs. The federal Government will then transfer an equal amount of money, which would have been paid under the Canada Assistance Plan as the federal share of the social assistance payment, to the programs involved.

The design, eligibility criteria, administrative requirements and evaluation methodology relating to these new arrangements will be developed by November 30, 1985, and the impact of this initiative will be reviewed in three years.

The money now allocated for social assistance can only be used for that purpose. This restriction exists for a very good purpose. This money is meant to provide for the basic needs of people who cannot support themselves. If people are in need their needs must be met and no conditions can be attached to that assistance. In particular, they cannot be required to perform work as a condition of receiving that aid. CAP does not permit "workfare". This principle is one of the most important principles of the Canada Assistance Plan, it will be maintained, and I want to stress that point.

What will be changed is the rigidities in our system of funding that prohibit funds now used to maintain a person on social assistance from being used to defray the costs of those programs that will provide that person with job skills and work experience. The Canadian jobs strategy provides precisely the kind of programming required by employable persons now on social assistance.

The first point of our agreement, increased targeting of these programs for social assistance recipients, will help. However, we want to make even more of this programming, or similar provincial programmings, available to our clients. To this end my provincial colleagues, the Minister of Employment and Immigration and I have agreed to use jointly moneys that would have been used to maintain a person on social assistance to pay the costs of the work experience programs that will enable him or her to get off assistance.

The mechanism is straightforward. The results may be profound and the costs will be no more than that of current programming. When an individual social assistance recipient is