The first Canadian Conference on Aging, sponsored by the Canadian Welfare Council in Toronto in January 1966, sought ways and means of improving the life of older people. Delegates represented labour, management, professional organizations, voluntary organizations and the churches. The report of the Special Committee of the Senate on Aging, released in February 1966, recommended a guaranteed income for older people, improvements in housing, health and institutional care, social services, community participation, recreation programs, and the establishment of a national commission on aging.

The Canada Pension Plan Act (SC 1964-65, c. 51) became operative on Jan. 1, 1966, establishing for the first time in Canada a comprehensive social insurance program of contributory, old age, disability and survivors' pensions (see pp. 326-329). The Quebec Pension Plan came into operation on the same date. (The Canada Pension Plan does not operate in Quebec because the legislation provides that the plan will not be operative in a province that establishes its own comparable program.) The Canada and Quebec Plans are almost identical and are to be so closely co-ordinated that a person may contribute under one Plan or the other, or to both Plans interchangeably, during his contributory period and receive the same benefits as if he had contributed to one Plan throughout this period.

The enactment of the Canada and Quebec Pension Plans emphasized the need for uniform private pension legislation across Canada. Quebec enacted the Supplemental Pension Plans Act with effect from July 15, 1965; the Ontario Pension Benefits Act was amended with effect from July 30, 1965; the Alberta Pension Benefits Act came into force on Jan. 1, 1967; and that of Saskatchewan was assented to on Apr. 1, 1967. The Pension Benefits Standards Act of Canada, relating to persons employed in works, undertakings and businesses (generally, banks and interprovincial transportation and communication services) under federal jurisdiction, was assented to on Mar. 23, 1967. All these Acts regulate private pension plans, ensure portability and solvency of the private plans, and require the provision of information to their members.

An amendment to the federal Agricultural Rehabilitation and Development Act (ARDA), assented to on May 12, 1966, renamed it the Agricultural and Rural Development Act and widened its scope correspondingly. This Act has important implications for welfare, in that its goals include "the development of income and employment opportunities" and "the improvement of standards of living". Related to ARDA is the Fund for Rural Economic Development Act, assented to on July 11, 1966, which provides funds for projects designed to develop particular areas under agreement with the provinces concerned. The amount of the Fund, originally $50,000,000, was increased to $300,000,000 by an amendment assented to on Mar. 10, 1967. (See Chapter X.)

The Canada Assistance Plan, assented to on July 15, 1966, provides for a comprehensive welfare system to replace the programs for specific categories, such as old age assistance, blind and disabled persons' allowances, and unemployment assistance. It extends previous social assistance and welfare coverage and substitutes a needs test for a test of means as a qualification for assistance. Provincial programs for persons in need, including health care services, will be supported by federal-provincial cost-sharing arrangements (see pp. 332-333).

The federal Medical Care Act, which provides for the setting up of a comprehensive medical care insurance program, was assented to on Dec. 21, 1966, to come into effect not later than July 1, 1968. There are three voluntary provincial plans in operation involving subsidization of premiums for low-income groups: the Alberta Health Plan (an extension of the former Alberta Medical Plan) began paying benefits on July 1, 1965; the British Columbia Medical Plan took effect on Sept. 1, 1965; and the Ontario Medical Services Insurance Plan took effect on July 1, 1966. (See pp. 308-310.)