

5.2.3 Special programs for welfare recipients

All provinces pay all or part of the cost of additional services required by residents in financial need under their social assistance programs. These costs are shared 50-50 by the federal government under the terms of the Canada Assistance Plan Act. The range of benefits varies from province to province, but may include such services as eyeglasses, prosthetic appliances, dental services, prescribed drugs, home care services, and nursing home care. Usually, if the benefit is universally available to insured residents under another program, this portion would not be administered under welfare auspices. The principal benefits are described in more detail below.

Physicians' services. The provincial medical care insurance plans cover provincial welfare recipients, without premium payments in provinces levying premiums. The rates of payment to their physicians are identical to those that apply to the general population. Benefits, usually a little broader, also include such otherwise uninsured items as travelling allowance and telephoned advice, the cost of these additional items being generally shared under the Canada Assistance Plan. Extra-billing by physicians is usually waived.

Hospital care. Every provincial hospital care insurance program covers welfare-allowance recipients without their payment of premiums or authorized charges.

Prescribed-drug benefits. In British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Quebec and Newfoundland, virtually all provincial public-assistance recipients are included in programs that provide prescribed drugs. In Alberta, recipients may purchase drugs and other benefits through the optional health plan at subsidized rates. The drug benefits in most provinces include practically every prescription drug and some unprescribed medications. Rates of payment to pharmacies and dispensing physicians are negotiated by provincial governments. In Saskatchewan, British Columbia and New Brunswick, certain beneficiaries may be obliged to pay a portion of the cost.

The government of Nova Scotia subsidizes recipients of local welfare allowances who purchase drugs provided under municipally-operated programs, and pays the full cost of drugs in certain cases of special need. Ontario paid 80% of municipal costs up to June 1976, and 100% thereafter. As already noted, Ontario also provides patients of nursing homes and persons receiving assistance under the government's province-wide family benefits program with free prescription drugs from a formulary of 1,200 items.

Dental care benefits. Dental benefit plans are operated for selected recipients of welfare in most provinces. In British Columbia, public-assistance recipients can qualify through special means tests for enrolment; a separate program is operated for the children, under 13 years of age, of all welfare recipients. The Ontario program provides dental benefits to persons in receipt of mothers' allowances and dependent fathers' allowances and their children under the age of 18; provincial assistance is also available for essential dental services for others, at municipal discretion. All provincial public-assistance recipients qualify for dental benefits under schemes operated in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and for selected categories of recipients in Manitoba.

Benefits under these dental plans typically exclude certain specified services and require prior authorization for some services. In the three most western provinces, posterior bridgework and prophylaxis are excluded. Prior authorization is required in British Columbia and Saskatchewan for dentures, relines, gold inlays, orthodontia, and periodontia. Payments to dentists are at negotiated fixed rates under each of these plans. Provision of dentures is subject to a co-charge of approximately 50% in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Optical care benefits. Health benefit schemes for welfare recipients include certain optical care services and eyeglasses in the four western provinces. With the nation-wide implementation of public medical care insurance programs, refrac-