

**Canadian Association of Social Workers Submission to the
Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration**

Concerning Sections 172 and 173 of Budget Bill C-43

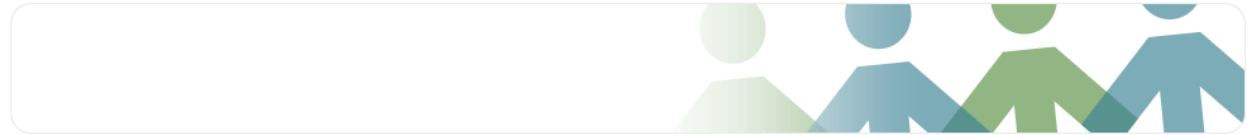
November 6, 2014



Social Work – Profession of Choice

Travail social - La profession de choix

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Concern

The Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) is deeply disappointed to learn that the Government of Canada chose to fundamentally alter its relationship with the provinces and territories regarding social assistance for refugee claimants within Bill C-43, introduced on Oct 23, 2014.

Specifically, Sections 172 and 173, which amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act, would allow provinces to impose minimum residency requirements on eligibility for social assistance benefits, but only in the case of certain populations.

In other words, a province or territory could decide that those refugees with certain kinds of status are not eligible for social assistance until they have lived in that province for a specified period of time. If not repealed, Sections 172 and 173 will effectively eliminate the only accountability mechanism imposed by the federal government to ensure any level of equity in the delivery of income assistance in Canada.

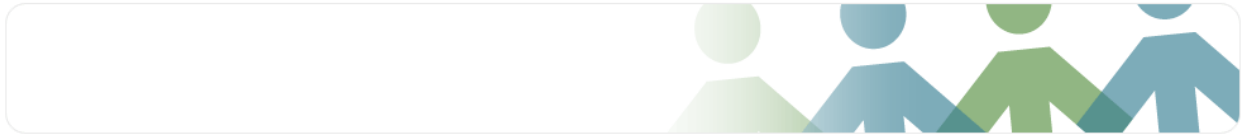
It is CASW's position that in order to safeguard equitable access to social assistance across Canada, there can be no minimum residency requirement for refugee claimants. Adequate and accountable social assistance is important to all people living in Canada, and remains part of the Canadian identity.

Background

The Canada Social Transfer (CST) is the primary source of federal funding in Canada that supports provincial and territorial social programs, specifically, post-secondary education, social assistance and social services, and programs for children. Federal legislation dictates only one condition that the provinces and territories are required to meet to receive CST funding: that there is no minimum residency period required before persons are eligible to receive social assistance.

Canadian advocates of human rights and equitable public policy are increasingly concerned, and have called for the government to introduce conditions and standards associated with the CST to improve accountability and to ensure that Canadians, regardless of location, have equal access to adequate social programming. This advocacy occurs in light of the knowledge that the social determinants of health, including income, early childhood education, employment, and access to adequate housing, among others, are extremely important contributing factors to the individual health and well-being of Canadians.

Two aspects of policy development gaining particular traction among advocates and policy-makers are poverty reduction and income security. Income has been widely cited as the most important determinant of health, primarily because of its interaction with other social determinants, and has remained at the forefront of public health discussions. In more developed nations, the importance of income can be seen directly in material living conditions, as well as indirectly in social participation, social resources, and social status.



While the constitution of Canada clearly gives the provinces primary responsibility for social, health, and educational services, it does not preclude the involvement of federal government in promoting pan-Canadian equity. A fairly well defined social contract between government and citizens developed in the twentieth century and is partially enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as the Constitution Act of 1982.

Since the 1990s, tax cuts and restrictive federalism have diminished the federal government's role in social programming, and federal fiscal contribution to provincial social programs is expected to decline. There is, in short, no pan-Canadian vision for social policy in this country. CASW is deeply concerned about the impact these 'hands off' policies and practices will have on the health care, social inclusion, and social protection of people living in Canada, and especially to our most vulnerable populations, refugees included.

If passed without repealing Sections 172 and 173, Bill C-43 will effectively eliminate the only accountability mechanism imposed by the federal government that ensures any level of equity for the delivery of income assistance in Canada. It is CASW's position that in order to safeguard equitable access to social assistance across Canada, there can be no minimum residency requirement for refugee claimants. Again, adequate and accountable social assistance is important to all people living in Canada, and remains an integral part of Canadian identity.

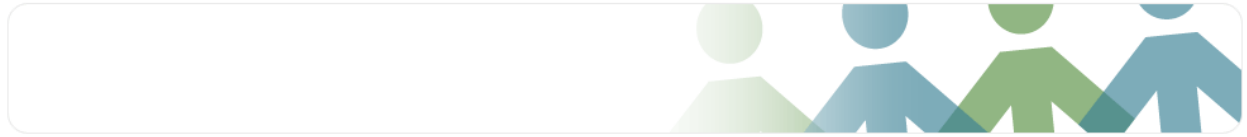
Recommendations

Recommendation # 1:

Sections 172 and 173 be removed from Bill C-43.

Recommendation # 2:

The federal government should take a leadership role in developing an overall vision for Canada's social system and specific objectives with respect to the Canada Social Transfer within that system. Principles of dignity, equality, anti-poverty, and accessibility should provide a foundation for this vision.

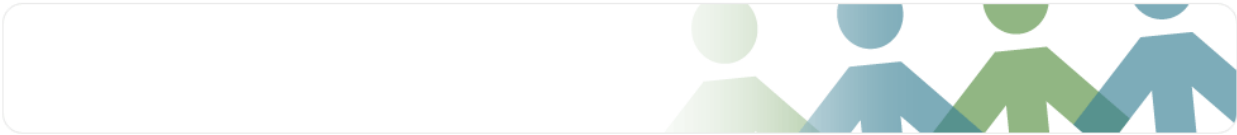


References

[Promoting Equity for a Stronger Canada: The Future of Canadian Social Policy](#) © 2014. Canadian Association of Social Workers.

[The Canada Social Transfer and the Social Determinants of Health](#) © 2013. Canadian Association of Social Workers.

[Canada Social Transfer Project - Accountability Matters](#) © 2012. Canadian Association of Social Workers.



Founded in 1926 the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) is the national association voice for the social work profession.

CASW has adopted a pro-active approach to issues pertinent to social policy/social work. It produces and distributes timely information for its members, and special projects are initiated and sponsored. With its concern for social justice and its continued role in social advocacy, CASW is recognized and called upon by both nationally and internationally for its social policy expertise.

The mission of CASW is to promote the profession of social work in Canada and advance social justice. CASW is active in the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW).

