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Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW)
Social Policy Principles

Rationale

The Canadian Association of Social Workers has a long history of commenting on, and analyzing, the social policies of the federal government. In making such comments, however, CASW, like any federation of professional associations, is faced with two important concerns. The first is the importance of having a set of principles to guide current and future assessments of federal social policy. The second is the need to link social policy and social work practice. Without a common understanding and commitment to principles, it is difficult to evaluate policy initiatives. Without linking social policy principles to practice, it is difficult for CASW to represent social workers across the country. This document, approved by the Board of Directors, addresses both concerns.

Established Social Policy Principles

There are some established social policy principles with which most social workers are likely to be in agreement. Three examples are the principles of the Canada Health Act, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, and social work codes of practice.

1. Canada Health Act

The five principles of the *Canada Health Act* are a cornerstone of the health care system. The act, originally passed unanimously by Parliament in 1984, affirms the federal government's commitment to basic principles which are used to guide funding to the provinces and territories. The principles are:

Public administration: the administration of the health care insurance plan of a province or territory must be carried out on a non-profit basis by a public authority.

Comprehensiveness: all medically necessary services provided by hospitals and doctors must be insured.

Universality: all insured persons in the province or territory must be entitled to public health insurance coverage on uniform terms and conditions.

Portability: coverage for insured services must be maintained when an insured person moves or travels within Canada or travels outside the country.

Accessibility: reasonable access by insured persons to medically necessary hospital and physician services must be unimpeded by financial or other barriers.

2. Caledon Institute of Social Policy

The Caledon Institute has played an important role in the development of the Canada Child Tax Benefit and the National Child Benefit. Both measures have significantly redirected the way in which families and children are financially supported in the country. In order to evaluate child benefit reform, the Caledon Institute uses the following principles:

Adequacy: maximum benefits for low-income families to meet the cost of raising a child.

Fairness: treating families equally if there are in like circumstances; low-income working families should have the same child benefits as those on welfare.

Dignity and Independence: test incomes anonymously through the tax system which applies to all Canadians, not just the poor.

Simplification: rationalization of various child benefits offered through the federal, provincial and territorial governments.

Anti-Poverty: reduction of the depth of poverty among low-income families.

3. Social Work Codes of Practice

Since its inception, the social work profession has advocated social justice and social policy reform. That tradition is reflected in the IFSW Declaration of Ethical Principles of Social Work and the CASW Social Work Code of Ethics (1994). The IFSW statement and the CASW Code include two important principles, which link social work practice to 'person-in-environment':

Dignity and Respect: each individual has a right to self-fulfillment to the extent that the right does not encroach on the right of others.

Equality: each person shall be treated equally without unfair discrimination on the basis of disability, color, social class, race, religion, language, political beliefs, sex or sexual orientation.

Advantage and Limitations of the Above Principles

The advantage of the above principles is that they provide an established base upon which CASW can draw to enunciate its own social policy principles. Many, if not all, of the principles reflect values and expectations which Canadians share and most are consonant with the stated values of social workers as stipulated in most codes of practice. Hence, several of them can be incorporated into a list of social policy principles for the association. There are, however, three limitations which need to be considered. The first is that some of the principles have been developed for specific policies. Hence, while they may be appropriate for some social programs, they may not be appropriate for others. For example, the anti-poverty principle of the Caledon Institute of Social Policy makes considerable sense when applied to child benefit legislation but is not particularly relevant to health care or even to some social services which are intended to prevent rather than reduce poverty. Similarly, the portability principle for health care has relevance to insured programs but is less relevant to other programs.

A second important limitation is that in none of the principles is there a declared commitment to the constitutional division of powers with respect to social programs in Canada. This is particularly problematic since some of the controversy about health, education and social services stems from federal intrusion into provincial affairs. Unless the problem is addressed in a manner which serves to correct the overlap, it is difficult to hold governments accountable since one level of government blames the other for inadequacies of funding. In the CASW policy principles which follow, the importance of adhering to a constitutional division of powers is incorporated into the list. A third and corollary limitation is that there is nothing in the aforementioned principles to guide the delivery of social programs. In some cases, it may be appropriate for governments to deliver programs. In other cases, governments may not be the best or most desirable form of provision. This issue is addressed below by reference to the principle of subsidiarity, which is widely acknowledged in Europe to deal with multiple levels of service delivery.

CASW Social Policy Principles

The following principles will be used by the Canadian Association of Social Workers to guide the evaluation of federal social policy initiatives. Each of the principles is accompanied by a short statement which identifies the linkage to practice:

> **Dignity and Respect**: each individual has a right to self-fulfillment to the extent that the right does not encroach on the right of others. To that end, social policy measures should intrude as little as possible on the choices which individuals make to realize their own personal life goals.
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> *Implication for Practice*: Commitment to the values of acceptance, self-determination and respect for clients.
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> **Equality**: because of the intrinsic worth of every human being, each person shall be treated equally without unfair discrimination on the basis of disability, color, social class, race, religion, language, political beliefs, sex or sexual orientation.

Implication for Practice: Affirmation of the importance of equal opportunity for clients to realize their full potential.

Equity: individuals and families are to be treated equally if they are in like circumstances; social inequalities are considered just to the extent that they result in compensating benefits for the least advantaged person in society.

Implication for Practice: Recognition of the need of affirmative action and targeting for some clients in order to minimize social exclusion.

Comprehensiveness: all persons in Canada are entitled to educational, health and social services and social security on uniform terms and conditions in a manner which assures a range of choice and maximizes respect for the individual.

Implications for Practice: Recognition that solidarity in society is a fundamental basis of cooperation with and among clients and significant others.

Quality Services: services are to be based on best practices and a participatory approach to their administration and improvement.

Implications for Practice: Empowerment of the client through excellence in the work place and involvement of the client in administrative decision-making.

Constitutional Integrity: social programs are to be financed, regulated, and provided with full regard to the jurisdictional responsibility and competence of each level of government.

Implications for Practice: Recognition of the regional and linguistic diversity of the country in the delivery of social services to clients.

Subsidiarity: social programs are to be provided at the lowest level of community possible unless it can be shown that they can be more effectively provided by higher levels of government.

Implications for Practice: Insuring that decisions, and the delivery of social services, are made as close as possible to the client.

Social Dialogue: governments should take all necessary steps to encourage and facilitate extensive consultation with relative social partners in the development of social policies and programs.

Implications for Practice: Recognition of the right, and obligation, of social workers to participate in professional and community associations in order to influence the development of social policies.

Approved by the CASW Board

March, 2003