

The Canada Social Transfer and the Social Determinants of Health

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: to ensure that there is no minimum residency period required before persons are eligible to receive social assistance (Library of Parliament, 2011; Department of Finance Canada, 2010). Canadian advocates of human rights and equitable public policy are increasingly concerned with accountability 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 individual health and well-being of Canadians (Raphael, 2004; Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010).

This paper investigates the adequacy of government provision and accountability in delivering social services through an in-depth exploration of income security funding at the national, provincial, and local level in Canada.

Research Methods

A comprehensive literature search was conducted looking for both academically published research and non-academic literature pertaining to the allocation of social service funding in Canada at the federal, provincial, and programmatic level.

An environmental policy scan was conducted to determine current practices and policies with respect to the allocation and use of the Canada Social Transfer impacting the social determinants of health. This included a provincial budget analysis for each nested case study and an analysis of income support policies in each province studied. Provincial government employees confirmed results where necessary.

A multi-level analysis was conducted analyzing the impact of federal policy on provincial spending, municipal programs, and the resulting implications for individual citizens and social workers.



Key Findings

At the National Level

Following the CST from the federal level, to the provincial level, to the individual level, we see a complex picture. The provinces start with equal per capita funding for social services, social assistance, children, and post-secondary education through the Canada Social Transfer.

At the Provincial Level

At the provincial level, there are differing scenarios of provincial need. For example, Saskatchewan has a significantly lower low-income rate when using the MBM than either Nova Scotia or British Columbia and additionally brings in substantial natural resource revenue. Still, each province received close to \$340.00 per capita annually for the 2012-13 fiscal year from the CST. Each province spent different amounts on social services, as reported by Statistics Canada in 2009. Per capita, the social service spending spanned from \$1,104 (Saskatchewan) to \$1,623 (British Columbia) with Nova Scotia in the middle at \$1,264 per person in 2009. As there is separate reporting for education spending, this figure does not include spending on all of the services supported by the CST. Spending just on social services for each province is three times the total funding transferred from the federal government through the CST.

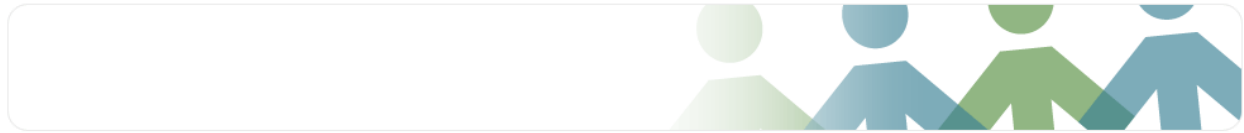
Each province in Canada provides some financial assistance to cover the cost of basic living requirements for an individual or family when all other financial resources have been exhausted (Federal-Provincial-Territorial (FPT) Directors of Income Support, 2008). Income security programs are administered by different ministries and are governed by different legislation and regulations. All provinces provide a myriad of programs that support individualized needs for people and families at different points in their lives.

At the Individual Level

Though the amount received by individuals, families, and persons with disabilities differs across Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and British Columbia, there is consistency in the types of programs offered. The annual income of income support recipients compared to the MBM showed that in all provinces studied, people who receive income assistance lack funds required to meet their basic needs. Single parent families experience the greatest gap (range for a single parent family with one child of \$9,914 annually in Saskatchewan to \$11,482 in Nova Scotia lacking to meet their basic needs). These gaps and inconsistencies across the three provinces examined here raise profound and troubling questions about the commitment of the federal government to realizing equality and human rights for Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Implications

The funding provided through the Canada Social Transfer is insufficient to meet most provincial spending on just income assistance, and falls even more drastically short of the actual funding that would be required to provide adequate social assistance, social services, childcare and early childhood education, and post-secondary education. Despite the lack of accountability and the lack of uniformity in social programming, there is no evidence that the provinces studied were



not spending CST funding in appropriate areas. However, it is vital that there be uniformity in the values and expectations driving social service funding and provision in Canada so that Canadians can be guaranteed an appropriate level of support.

Recommendations

Recommendation # 1: All parties involved in financing and delivering social programs (federal and provincial government) should come together to **develop conditions** that meet the accountability for human rights demanded by the Constitution of Canada.

Recommendation # 2: The **federal and provincial governments** should agree on an **accountability framework** and process for reporting and enforcing conditions related to provincial spending of CST funds.

Recommendation # 3: 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.

Recommendation # 4: The **federal government** should make a commitment to the **protection of human rights** in Canada by: 1) increasing CST funding to the provinces, 2) securing an ongoing commitment to the CST, and developing additional national strategies to secure social programming such as a National Poverty Reduction Strategy.

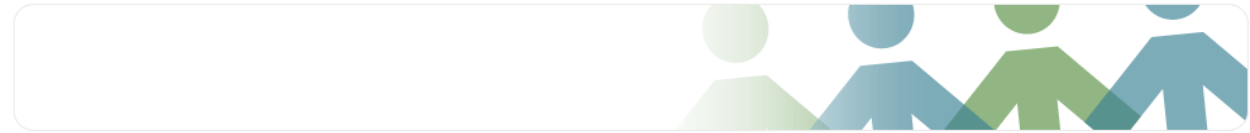
Recommendation # 5: In addition to participating in recommendations #1 and #2 above, the provinces should take a leadership role in revitalizing the Provincial-Territorial Council on Social Policy Renewal to guide national social policy issues.

Recommendation # 6: Non-governmental organizations should also take a leadership role in educating Canadian citizens about the current lack of accountability in social programming.

Recommendation # 7: Non-governmental organizations, social policy think tanks and academics should be brought together to form a coalition whose purpose is to ensure that the CST and accountability measures stay on the political agenda.

Recommendation # 8: That individual social workers and citizens send a letter to their local MPs and MPPs stating their disapproval with the current lack of accountability around social programming in Canada and asking their parliamentary representatives to take action on the above recommendations.

Recommendation #9: That individual social workers and citizens sign the petition put forth by CASW and join the social movement calling for increased accountability in social programming.



Conclusions

Our research highlights that adequate and accountable social programming is important to people living in Canada, and remain part of Canadian identity. Yet the gaps, inconsistencies, and lack of accountability found across the three provinces examined indicate a lack of commitment on the part of the federal government to realizing equality and human rights for all people in Canada.

Critically, the funding provided through the Canada Social Transfer is insufficient to meet the amounts required provincially to provide adequate social assistance, social services, childcare and early childhood education, and post-secondary education.

There exist many opportunities for strengthening accountability and improving Canada's performance on the social determinants of health including: creating conditions on the CST, FPT collaboration on an accountability framework, federal leadership in developing a vision for social services, federal commitment to planning and funding social services, provincial revitalization of the Provincial-Territorial Council on Social Policy Renewal. Individuals and organizations can take action in: educating Canadians about the current lack of accountability in social service programming, lobbying for change, and joining tCASWin this movement towards accountability.

Access the full report by clicking the below links:

English: [Canada Social Transfer and the Social Determinants of Health](#)

Français: [Le Transfert canadien en matière de programmes sociaux et les déterminants sociaux de la santé](#)

