

Abstract

Basic responsibility for social welfare is constitutionally assigned to the provinces. However, the federal government has been involved in providing funds for this purpose since the late 1920s. The Canada Assistance Plan 1966 details the terms of federal-provincial cost-sharing for certain social assistance programs. This use of federal spending power can be justified by equality of opportunity provisions introduced in the Constitution Act 1982.

An important issue in financing social assistance programs is the per capita case load each province faces and its ability to meet that demand at levels consistent with national standards. Indicators of need generated in this thesis show that those provinces which face the highest need are those least able to finance social assistance programs at a level comparable to other provinces.

This thesis also reviews the federal government's unilaterally imposed limit on growth of Canada Assistance Plan expenditures in its 1990 budget, resulting in a court challenge by British Columbia. The decisions of the British Columbia Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court are described. Ultimately the Supreme Court upheld the doctrine of Supremacy of Parliament. The implications of this for cost-sharing programs are discussed.