

Ontario Has Medicare Plan But Joining Not Compulsory

TORONTO (CP) — The Ontario government has unveiled a publicly-operated medical insurance plan that will be universally available, although not compulsory.

The scheme will offer the greatest benefit to persons receiving welfare assistance and to low-income groups.

Health Minister Matthew Dymond estimated the cost of the plan at \$65,000,000 to \$70,000,000. It will start April 1 for welfare recipients and July 1 for the general public.

Dr. Dymond said the Ontario Medical Association objected to the payment of 90 per cent of the OMA fee schedule.

The plan will cover physicians' services mainly, but will be extended to specialists when patients are referred to them—an innovation not included in the old plan.

Also, an eight-month waiting period before maternity benefits are paid has been eliminated.

Whether doctors practise inside or outside of the plan will be up to them. The health minister said no attempt would be made to sign individual contracts with doctors. The government hopes doctors will decide to bill the medical services insurance division of the department of health instead of patients directly.

Dr. Dymond said the government-operated plan could not be labelled medicare, which embraces the whole field of health services. The Ontario plan was based on physicians' services.

Dr. Dymond said about 82 per cent of Ontario's 7,000,000 residents now are covered by some form of medical care insurance. In theory the government plan could raise this to 100 per cent.

TOP PREMIUM \$150

Now the government itself plans to provide medical insurance to the public. The maximum annual premium will be \$150 for a family of three or more.

For a couple the charge will be \$120 and for a single person \$60. These rates will be substantially lower for families with below-average incomes.

A family of three or more with taxable income of less than \$1,300 a year will pay only \$60 in annual premiums, spread over four instalments. The government will pay the remaining \$60.

Doctors will be paid 90 per cent of their regular fee schedule under the plan. They may bill either the government or the patient. The old legislation would have given doctors 100 per cent of their fee schedule.

A couple with taxable income of less than \$1,000 will pay \$60 premium, the government will contribute a similar amount. Individuals with taxable income of \$500 or less will share a \$60 premium with the government.

WILL BE ENROLLED

Any family receiving welfare will be enrolled automatically in the plan and will pay no premiums. Estimates of the number of persons covered under this provision vary from 243,000 to 300,000.

Those eligible for complete subsidization will be families receiving aid under any of the following acts: Blind Persons' Allowances, Disabled Persons' Allowances, General Welfare Assistance, Mothers' Allowances, Old Age Assistance and Rehabilitation Services.

The new plan may mean nothing to the majority of people covered by group insurance plans.

Groups will not be allowed to enrol in the publicly-operated plan, Dr. Dymond said. However, persons working at the same place could enrol individually.

The minister estimated that if everyone eligible for complete or partial subsidization enrolled in the plan, it would cover 1,800,000 Ontario residents at an average cost of \$45.

BRISTOL

A wedding of interest to Bristol residents will take place shortly in Puerto Rico, when Paul Alexander MacDonald, formerly of Bristol, takes as his bride Rosalina Mercado of Puerto Rico. Mr. MacDonald, is a son of the late Mr. and Mrs. Joseph MacDonald and their old home is in the lakeside district. Mr. MacDonald's grandfather James Whalen, still resides here. His mother was the former Marion Whalen. Mr. MacDonald's many friends here wish to send their best wishes to the young couple through this news as Mr. MacDonald is a home news lover and they read the Guardian out there and no doubt will come home again for at least a vacation with old friends.

Louis McGuire, is a patient in Charlottetown Hospital where he underwent surgery last week. He expects to be home again late this week.

Mrs. Walter O'Brien, who has been in Charlottetown Hospital for several weeks is expected to be released this week and return to her duties on the hospital staff shortly in better health.

Mrs. Louis McGuire and members of her family were Sunday visitors to the city where Mr. McGuire is a hospital patient.

Mrs. Reginald McAdam, and Mrs. Francis McAdam were in the city on Tuesday. Other visitors were Mrs. Aldus McKenzie and Freman Jay.

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