

ONTARIO BILL TO CREATE OWN HEALTH PLAN

Ontario is to have its own public health insurance plan independent of the Dominion health proposals now before the Social Security Committee of the House of Commons.

Health Minister Dr. R. P. Vivian gave notice of motion yesterday of his Government's intention to introduce a bill in the Legislature entitled the Ontario Municipal Health Services Act. In the words of Dr. Vivian it is designed to create "adequate and satisfactory services for the treatment of illness as well as certain preventive measures."

The Ontario plan will be carried out in conjunction with the municipalities and will be on an optional basis. It will be financed by per capita contributions and a Provincial grant.

It was stressed that Ontario's decision to enact its own health insurance measure does not close the door on eventual co-operation with Ottawa, provided, however, that Ottawa produces a plan which meets with approval of the Ontario Government. If such an overall plan is produced—and there is no bill at present before the House of Commons—there is nothing to prevent the Provincial plan from being integrated with the national program.

Ottawa Said Indefinite.

"This is not something in proposal form as far as Ontario is concerned," Premier George Drew said in an interview. "We are bringing in legislation. Ottawa has merely a proposal and we do not know what a bill is likely to contain. There is no legislation before the House of Commons at the moment. We are moving to do things which it is felt must be done now."

The Dominion Government's health insurance plan is viewed with a doubtful eye by the Ontario Cabinet. It questions the cost figures and the standard of services proposed, as well as other features of the draft proposal.

A Provincial plan will better serve the needs of Ontario from all view-

points, it is felt. While Dr. Vivian had nothing to say at this time as to what the Provincial plan will cost, it is understood the per capita cost will be considerably less than that called for in the Dominion proposal. The Ontario program will provide a basis well within the ability of the taxpayer to absorb, something which it is claimed is lacking in the Dominion scheme.

In a statement to the press Dr. Vivian declared that the passing of the Ontario legislation should meet with the approval of all groups in the House, "and will be a major step forward to make available to all residents of this Province adequate medical, surgical, hospital, and other care."

The Health Minister emphasized that his bill will in no way interfere with the present patient-doctor relationship, but will provide for an improved type of medical care available to all on a basis satisfactory to the medical and allied professions, "at a cost within the means of every one, and by a method of payment that will ease the financial burden in the cost of sickness."

The statement added: "It is designed to create a satisfactory standard of adequate medical care by general practitioners, specialists, etc., but it will not place a ceiling upon the desires of the people to avail themselves of any extra luxury or comfort beyond that satisfactory standard which they may wish to secure, and for which they themselves are prepared to pay."

Asked later if the position of health-insurance groups such as Associated Medical Services would be affected by the Ontario legislation, Dr. Vivian said they would be given every consideration, and there was no desire on the part of the Government to force anything upon them. He indicated that they would have the option of joining in the plan or proceeding as before.

Provisions For "Areas."

"One important feature will be the provision of special plans for areas in Ontario that might be designated as areas badly in need of health improvement," Dr. Vivian said. "For this the Government plans to make special provisions, aided if necessary by grants of money based upon need."

"The Ontario Municipal Health Services Act should receive widespread acclaim from rural areas in Ontario which have been desirous of adequate services for those areas, obtained by a method within their means," said Dr. Vivian. "But this proposed legislation goes much further than any plan yet produced, such as the municipal doctor scheme in Western Canada and, in a limited way, upon St. Joseph's Island in Ontario. This act is not designed for rural areas alone but, where desired, will cover any section of the Province."

While Dr. Vivian said nothing as to whether the Ontario act is to be optional or mandatory, the words "where desired" are taken to indicate that the Provincial scheme will be optional. The Dominion proposal is mandatory, all citizens having to pay whether they wish to or not.

Northern Ontario.

In his prepared statement Dr. Vivian said the act will be particularly applicable to Northern Ontario where, because of the very nature of the settlements, adequate medical services are not easily procurable. The type of service to be rendered will be produced with the aid of the Ontario Medical Association, the Ontario Hospitals Association and other groups that represent the organized personnel rendering service in the treatment of illness.

"In addition to this legislation," said Dr. Vivian, "the Drew Government has planned a full public health program for the prevention of illness and the safeguarding of good health. This will be shown at the time of introduction of amendments to the Public Health Act. The program has been reviewed by many competent authorities who claim that, when it has fully materialized, Ontario will undoubtedly have a public health service unmatched in any large rural Province or State."

Associations May Continue.

Ottawa, March 3 (CP). — Group hospital associations such as the Ontario and Quebec Hospital Associations and other "Blue Cross" organizations will not necessarily disappear if health insurance is enacted in Canada, a spokesman for the Federal Health Department said today.

It will be up to Provincial commissions, which will be established when health insurance is adopted, to decide whether the associations will be allowed to continue, this spokesman said.

"It will be quite possible for the Provincial commissions to make provision for hospitalization through those groups. It will be up to the commissions to work out the details."

The spokesman said insurance companies could continue to sell policies which included sickness benefits, "but these, too, would be supernumerary."

"The health insurance bill as drafted does not include any cash benefit that would provide, for example, half of the sick person's ordinary salary."

"The modern trend is to dissociate cash benefits from medical benefits. In health insurance bills where there are cash benefits, doctors are sometimes put in an embarrassing position."

"A doctor may know that a man who claims he is sick is perfectly well. However, if he doesn't give the man a certificate stating he is ill he knows he will lose the man as a patient."