

# Community Dispatch

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## CANADA VOTES 2004 – FEDERAL ROLE IN SOCIAL POLICY

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### ISSUE 4: FEDERAL ROLE IN SOCIAL POLICY

The federal government provides funding to the provinces to support social programs under provincial jurisdiction via cash and tax transfers. In 2004-05, the provinces will receive \$50.4 billion in federal funding.

Before 1996, provinces had to meet a variety of conditions to receive federal funding. For example, income assistance funding required provinces to uphold a right for persons in need to receive benefits, a right to a sufficient level of income, and a right not to have to work in exchange for welfare. These rules helped to ensure that welfare programs remained comparable across Canada, and reflected broadly held beliefs about the supports that should be available to citizens.

With the adoption of the Canada Health and Social Transfer in 1996, many funding conditions were eliminated. Provinces now have considerable latitude on where to direct funding within general target areas. For example, early childhood development funding was used by Manitoba to support more comprehensive child care, while Ontario has used these dollars to develop early year initiatives and support for autism but excluding child care.

Divergent provincial policies suggest that it is time to reinstate debate on national standards. While provinces should have flexibility to design appropriate services, national standards will help us reclaim Canadians' historical commitment to a social safety net for all citizens.

Social policy is largely an area of provincial responsibility, but the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA) signed by federal and provincial

governments (except Quebec) in 1999 acknowledges that Ottawa has a leadership role to play. It can use this role to begin conversations with provinces around the values we want our social infrastructure to reflect and the importance of consistency in available services. If some provinces are disinterested in national social policy dialogue, SUFA permits Ottawa to experiment with delivering funding directly to municipalities. Citizens can ask their federal representatives what they think about this option, especially if some provinces resist (re)committing to a pan-Canadian social vision.

### Issues:

- Available social supports have become uneven across Canada.
- National standards for income assistance, child care, and so on, are one tool with which to reinstate debate on the kind of social infrastructure we want in Canada.
- The Social Union Framework Agreement leaves room for Ottawa to take a leadership role in the social policy arena.

### Questions for Candidates:

- What is your party's position on national standards?
- What will your party do to ensure that all Canadians have access to reasonably comparable social programs?
- Will you honour the spirit of SUFA and engage communities and municipalities in a dialogue on social issues?

**To find out more:**

- Funding for Early Childhood Development:  
[www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/rma/account/sufa-ecus/ecd-dpe\\_e.asp](http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/rma/account/sufa-ecus/ecd-dpe_e.asp)
- Federal Support for Early Childhood Development and Early Learning and Child Care:  
[www.fin.gc.ca/fedprov/ecde.html](http://www.fin.gc.ca/fedprov/ecde.html)
- Social Union Framework Agreement: [www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/rma/account/sufa-ecus\\_e.asp](http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/rma/account/sufa-ecus_e.asp)
- Childcare Resource and Research Unit:  
[www.childcarecanada.org](http://www.childcarecanada.org)



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