

Public Assistance Goals: Recommendations of the Social Security Board*

THE PURPOSE of public assistance is to provide at least a minimum degree of economic security to persons in need. Public assistance programs complement other programs for economic security by supplying basic maintenance to needy persons for whom benefits are not available or are insufficient. The relative place of public assistance in a system of social security depends on the scope and adequacy of other measures designed to keep people from becoming needy.

Looking into the future, we may assume that public assistance will play a progressively smaller role as coverage of the social insurances is extended, benefits become more nearly adequate, additional risks are insured, and the insurance programs have time to mature. In the immediate future, however, and perhaps for a generation, public assistance will be a major part of the social security system. Whether the volume of need is larger or smaller, public assistance should meet effectively whatever need exists.

Because of the social and economic dislocations resulting from the war and the impending transition to peace, 1945 sessions of State legislatures will face problems of unusual complexity and magnitude. The forces of war and peace are intensifying the need for amendments to public assistance legislation. Yet the experience of the 9 years during which the Social Security Act has been operating indicates that changes would be in order even in normal times. State legislatures will be concerned not only with measures to improve old-age assistance, aid to dependent children, and aid to the blind, which come under the Social Security Act, but also with ways of strengthening general assistance, which is now wholly a responsibility of State and local governments.

During the war years, major changes have taken place in governmental provisions for aiding needy

*Recommendations for improvement of State public assistance legislation in the 1945 State legislative sessions, sent by the Board to State public assistance agencies.

persons. With the liquidation of the Federal work programs and the termination of the food stamp plan and surplus commodity distribution, old-age assistance, aid to dependent children, and aid to the blind—operated by States and localities with the financial help of the Federal Government—and the program of general assistance—operated by the States and localities without Federal sharing of costs—have become in nearly all States the only means of furnishing public aid.

The essential flexibility of public assistance has been amply demonstrated by the substantial declines in assistance rolls during the war. Between December 1941, when Pearl Harbor was attacked, and July 1944, the number of cases on the general assistance rolls declined 68 percent and the number of families receiving aid to dependent children, 34 percent. Recipients of old-age assistance declined 7 percent in number, and there was even a decrease of 6 percent in the number of persons getting aid to the blind.

The effect of the war in reducing need was somewhat greater than these figures indicate, since many State programs of old-age assistance, aid to dependent children, and aid to the blind were not fully developed and the trend in the number of recipients of these types of aid was still upward when mounting demands for manpower opened up jobs to marginal groups, such as old people, older women without skills, and the handicapped, and to persons not normally in the labor force, such as mothers and children.

Even in July 1944, more than 3.3 million persons were on relief rolls—2.1 million old people, 0.6 million children deprived of parental support or care, 73,000 blind persons, and 0.5 million persons in families receiving general assistance. Most of the persons receiving general assistance were suffering from disabilities or advanced age. Some of them might have been eligible for the special types of public assistance but were excluded by State eligibility conditions

more restrictive than those in the Federal act; not a few were receiving general assistance to supplement inadequate payments of old-age assistance, aid to dependent children, and aid to the blind. In even the highly favorable circumstances of the past year, the Nation's bill for public assistance was almost a billion dollars.

During the reconversion ahead, the need for assistance inevitably will increase. The problems of adjustment will of course be less intense if the war ends in two stages rather than one. In any event, great changes will occur, and these changes may be expected to affect seriously the marginal groups who left the assistance rolls or were kept off them by participation in the war effort. Many persons whose support was assumed by relatives enjoying greatly increased take-home pay will also be affected adversely.

It is estimated that a year after V-E day, which will be followed by drastic curtailment of war production, return of many servicemen, and shifts of war workers, somewhere between 3.5 and 8 million workers will be looking for new jobs. The most probable current estimate is that between 5 and 6 million individuals will be separated from jobs at the end of the first year following Germany's defeat. If the war with Japan should end at about the same time as the European war, these numbers would be even greater.

In any circumstances, the disruptions of reconversion will bear hardest on groups of marginal employability. Many workers will withdraw voluntarily from the labor force because of advanced age or disability or to resume home duties or to go back to school, and others will be squeezed out. Other workers of low employability will have difficulty in finding work. Some marginal workers will be eligible for unemployment benefits or for permanent retirement benefits. On the other hand, some will have been in farm work, domestic service, or other noncovered employment, and still others will have been in covered employment too short a time to acquire benefit rights. Obviously such persons must look to public assistance to meet their needs when their resources are exhausted.

State legislatures should also give consideration to the probable effects of declines in pay envelopes and rises in price levels. Curtailment of hours of work will substantially reduce earnings unless wage rates rise. Moreover, unless economic controls are maintained, price levels may climb higher. Such changes may impose great hardships on low-income groups. Some increases in the demand for assistance may be expected from recipients and persons on the borderline of need whose incomes fail to keep pace with mounting living costs.

In order to assist State public assistance agencies to meet need effectively, the Social Security Board has made recommendations to the Congress for amendment of titles I, IV, and X of the Social Security Act, which authorize Federal financial participation in old-age assistance, aid to dependent children, and aid to the blind. The Board has also recommended that Federal grants be made available to the States for general assistance. Although the Board believes that further Federal financial participation is necessary to enable States—particularly the poorer States—to provide adequate assistance to all persons who are needy, many steps to improve assistance programs can be taken by States without additional financial aid from the Federal Government. Moreover, certain improvements can be made through administrative action without statutory changes, though they may require increase in appropriations. The States which must await increased Federal matching to expand coverage or to improve the adequacy of assistance can at least amend their laws so as to take full advantage of Federal matching under the present titles and to be prepared to make further improvement if and when the Federal Government is able to assume a larger share of the cost.

More Adequate Assistance Payments

Assistance could be made more nearly adequate in many States by changes in State laws or plans to remove the maximums on payments of aid to dependent children, remove or increase maximums on payments of old-age assistance and aid to the

blind, authorize the provision of medical services to recipients, and delete prohibitions against the simultaneous receipt of more than one type of assistance.

Removal or Increase of Maximums

The urgency of eliminating or raising maximums on payments depends on the amounts of the maximums and the extent to which these limitations prevent meeting of need. In many States, a large proportion of the families receiving aid to dependent children get payments at fixed maximums that are too low to provide the minimum essentials of living. In some States, maximums on payments of old-age assistance and aid to the blind make it impossible to meet the full need of substantial numbers of aged and blind persons, particularly those who require medical care.

The Social Security Act, which limits the amount of an individual payment in which the Federal Government will share, has influenced States to establish maximums on payments under their programs. Federal funds can be used for half of payments of aid to dependent children up to only \$18 a month for one child in a family and \$12 for each other child aided. On the other hand, the Federal Government can pay half the cost of a payment to a recipient of old-age assistance or aid to the blind up to as much as \$40 monthly.

Many State laws limit payments to recipients to the amounts governing the Federal contribution. Some State laws stipulate that payments shall be limited to whatever amounts the Federal Government will match. In some States that do not have legal maximums, all payments are limited administratively to the amount of the Federal matching maximums because funds are insufficient to meet the full need of all recipients.

The Social Security Board has recommended to Congress removal of the maximums governing Federal matching in aid to dependent children and increase in the maximums for old-age assistance and aid to the blind. Without waiting for amendment of the Federal act, however, some States have eliminated maximums on aid to dependent children payments or have established maximums higher than those in the Social Security Act.

Eight States have eliminated maximums in all three types of assistance.

Twenty-two States now have no maximums—either legal or administrative—on payments of aid to dependent children, and five States have maximums higher than the \$18/\$12 limiting Federal matching. Among the States with maximums, the highest amount that can be paid to a mother and one child ranges from \$15 to \$50. In several States, maximums are so low that more than three-fourths of the payments are at the maximum.

In most States, old-age assistance payments may not exceed \$40 (or \$80 for two aged persons in a family), but 10 States have maximums of \$30 or less. A few States impose maximums on total income, including assistance and other resources, rather than on the assistance payment. Although the \$40 maximum limits a relatively small proportion of payments in most States, this amount is often insufficient to enable States to meet the needs of recipients who require medical or nursing care. Several States provide that payments may exceed \$40 for such recipients.

In aid to the blind, the great majority of States have maximums of \$40, but six States have statutory or administrative maximums of \$30 or even less. The proportion of recipients receiving maximum payments of aid to the blind is higher than in old-age assistance, primarily because blind persons, on account of their handicap, generally have additional needs.

Price increases during the war have made it increasingly difficult for needy persons to live on their assistance payments. If prices should rise higher in the reconversion, needy persons will feel even more the pinch of their small fixed incomes unless steps are taken to lift the maximums on payments.

Provision for Medical Care

Most States make some provision for the medical care of recipients of public assistance, but these provisions vary greatly in scope and adequacy from State to State and often from locality to locality. The experience of the armed services, which have found it necessary to reject large numbers of men with preventable or

remediable conditions that render them unfit for military service, emphasizes the importance of more effective medical provisions. Studies show that the prevalence of illness and disability is greater among dependent groups than among those of higher economic status. The Social Security Board believes that if the needs of recipients of public assistance are to be met fully, provision must be made for assuring that they receive medical care. An adequate program of medical care can reduce or minimize dependency and disability and aid in enabling many persons to gain a self-supporting status.

Assistance payments that are limited to the amounts of the Federal matching maximums are often too low to supply even basic maintenance. If maximums are eliminated or raised, medical needs can more effectively be met through the money payment. Experience indicates, however, that medical needs sometimes can best be met by arranging for such service. Therefore, in addition to higher maximums or the elimination of maximums, the Social Security Board has recommended that the Social Security Act be amended to authorize Federal matching of payments to suppliers of medical services. The Board is of the opinion that funds used for medical services under all assistance programs should be combined. Such pooling would spread the risk over a larger group and would afford maximum flexibility in the use of available funds.

Although increased Federal matching would greatly assist States in developing well-rounded medical care programs, some States have already made notable progress in this direction. State plans for providing medical care to the needy are extremely varied and attest to the ingenuity of legislatures and administrative agencies in adapting plans to State and local resources and conditions. The Social Security Board believes that State public assistance agencies should move ahead as rapidly as possible in the development of their programs of medical care for needy persons. Among present lacks requiring study is continuing hospital or nursing-home care for needy individuals who are chronically ill and need long-time nursing and medical attention.

Receipt of Two or More Types of Assistance

The Social Security Act requires that a State plan for aid to the blind must provide that no assistance will be paid to an aged blind individual for any period for which he is getting old-age assistance. Many State laws provide that a recipient of one type of public assistance may not receive any other form of public aid. Some of these laws except temporary medical or surgical care. Often it is not possible to meet a recipient's needs fully under one program, particularly if the amount of assistance that he may get under that program is limited by a maximum. Consequently, the Social Security Board believes that, except for meeting the provision in the Social Security Act with respect to the simultaneous receipt of old-age assistance and aid to the blind, State laws should not prevent recipients from getting two or more types of public assistance simultaneously. The most constructive approach to meeting the needs of an individual fully, however, would be to eliminate all restrictions that prevent attainment of this goal under a single program.

Extension of Coverage

If freedom from want is to be a reality in the States of the Nation, no needy person should be without access to the means of subsistence. State legislatures should examine the conditions of eligibility for each type of assistance and consider whether legislative changes are needed to extend coverage to groups of persons who are now excluded.

Few States, if any, are now taking full advantage of the Federal offer of matching funds under the Social Security Act. Thus they are throwing on general assistance, financed without Federal aid, the burden of supporting some needy persons who are potentially eligible for old-age assistance, aid to dependent children, or aid to the blind but are barred by unnecessarily restrictive conditions of eligibility. Moreover, in many States some groups of needy persons are ineligible for even general assistance.

Residence Requirements

The Social Security Act does not require that a State impose any residence requirement as a condition of

eligibility but merely specifies the maximum period that may be imposed. No State may, as a condition of eligibility for old-age assistance or aid to the blind, require more than 5 years' residence in the State in the last 9 years and 1 year in the State preceding application. For aid to dependent children, the maximum residence that may be required of a child is 1 year or, if the child is less than a year old, 1 year's residence in the State on the part of the mother prior to the birth of the child. For general assistance, many States require local settlement as a condition of eligibility.

The great majority of States have adopted the maximum residence requirements permitted by the Social Security Act for old-age assistance, aid to dependent children, and aid to the blind. On the other hand, some States limit residence requirements for old-age assistance and aid to the blind to 3 years, 2 years, or 1 year, and a few States have eliminated residence requirements entirely under one or more programs.

States have imposed eligibility restrictions in order to limit assistance to their own residents. It is understandable that States wished to restrict eligibility to their own residents when only a few States provided assistance to special groups and financed these programs wholly from State and local funds. Such restrictions are less defensible now that all States provide assistance financed from Federal as well as State and local funds. Modern conditions demand mobility of population. The war has greatly accelerated the long-time trends in the movement of population to centers of industrial development. As a result of such migrations, many people have lost their residence or settlement in the place from which they came without gaining it in the place where they now are. It is unrealistic, moreover, to assume that all workers who have moved to war-production centers will return to their former place of residence. Nor is it desirable to force such return, since jobs frequently will not be available in communities from which people have come and many migrants now have no ties in these places.

Provision should be made to aid

needy persons wherever they live. Consequently, the Board believes that States should eliminate or minimize all eligibility requirements that relate to length of residence in the State.

Citizenship

While the Social Security Act does not require citizenship as a condition of eligibility for public assistance, it permits the States to require citizenship. Twenty-six States make citizenship a condition of eligibility for old-age assistance and seven for aid to the blind. Only one State requires that children must be citizens to be eligible for aid to dependent children. Many older persons who are not citizens have lived for a long time in the United States but have been unable either to obtain documentation necessary to qualify them for citizenship or to pass the literacy test. In many States, the effect of excluding needy noncitizens from the special types of public assistance has been to place the burden of their support on general assistance, financed in large part from local funds. The Social Security Board is of the opinion that assistance should not be denied to noncitizens if they are needy and otherwise eligible.

Transfer of Property To Qualify for Assistance

All States permit recipients of assistance to own some property. Most States, however, require as a condition of eligibility that an applicant must not have disposed of property for the purpose of qualifying for assistance. Some State laws specify a period, ranging from 2 to 5 years preceding application for assistance, during which there must not have been a transfer of property to qualify for assistance. These provisions are extremely difficult and costly to administer because in all cases it must be established that these transfers have not occurred, though the actual number of transfers is small. In these cases, moreover, the motives are difficult to trace. Such provisions tend to bar applicants from assistance if they have transferred property within a specified time even though they had no intent to dispose of the property to qualify for aid. States may wish to consider the desirability of eliminating such eligibility requirements that disqualify needy persons otherwise eligible.

Liberalization of Provisions Regarding Support by Relatives

The Social Security Act provides that in determining the need of an individual, consideration shall be given to his income and other resources. Some State plans go further and provide that a potential contribution of a responsible relative shall be taken into account, even though the relative has not given assurance that the contribution will actually be made. In fact, it may even be known that the relative will not contribute.

Such provisions assume that, if the presumed contribution is not made, either the applicant or the agency has recourse to court action to compel support. If court action is not initiated, the agency continues to assume that the presumed income is available.

This policy has not proved constructive. Often the recipient's need is not relieved. When court action is taken, family relationships almost inevitably become strained. Sometimes, too, despite a court order, the contribution is not regularly received.

The Social Security Board is of the opinion that the income and resources considered in the determination of need should be actual, not merely potential, and should be appreciable and significant in meeting the recipient's present and future needs. Thus the Board believes that provisions conditioning eligibility for assistance on the ability of relatives to support should be eliminated from State laws. The moral and legal obligation of relatives to support needy individuals of course would still exist, but contributions from relatives would be counted as income only when actually received. Denial of assistance to needy persons should not be used as a method of enforcing the support laws of the State.

Extension of Coverage for Aid to Dependent Children

Though children constitute our country's most important resource, the development of aid to dependent children has lagged behind that of old-age assistance in many States. This discrepancy has been due in part to the relatively less favorable matching provisions for aid to dependent

children in the Federal act, and in part to restrictive eligibility conditions imposed by State law or policy and inadequate State appropriations for this type of aid.

Under the Social Security Act, the Federal Government will participate in payments for a dependent child who is living with a parent or other specified relative and who has been deprived of parental support or care by the death, continued absence from home, or physical or mental incapacity of a parent. Federal matching is available for such children who are in need if they are under 16 years of age, and until age 18 if they are attending school. The States differ greatly in the extent to which they are taking advantage of these eligibility provisions to obtain Federal matching funds. Within the framework of the present Federal act, substantial development of many State programs of aid to dependent children is possible.

Federal funds may be used in the payment to a dependent child who is living with a parent or adoptive parent, grandparent, brother or sister, stepparent, stepbrother or sister, uncle, or aunt, or certain other relatives within the same degrees of relationship. Some States, however, specify relationship more narrowly and consequently exclude certain dependent children who might be benefiting from the program.

In many States, aid to dependent children is severely hampered by restrictive legal provisions or administrative interpretations relating to a parent's continued absence from home or incapacity. The Board suggests that States review their interpretations of these provisions with a view to liberalizing them if they are unduly limiting.

States vary greatly in defining what constitutes continued absence from home. Some States require that an absent parent must have been away for a specified length of time, such as 6 months or a year. Some require that if a parent has deserted, the mother must take court action to establish absence or secure support of the child before applying for assistance and may require the mother to get affidavits from leading citizens attesting to the father's desertion. Some States bar from assistance chil-

dren whose parent is imprisoned. Such provisions consider only secondarily the child, whose needs often must go unmet because of acts of the parent. Moreover, such eligibility requirements often intensify family problems rather than resolve them.

The States differ widely also in interpretations of physical and mental incapacity. In some States, the interpretations are rigid and restrictive. Some States, for example, recognize incapacity only of a wage-earning parent. Some require that the incapacity shall be complete or permanent or expected to last for as long as 1 year. A few States, on the other hand, have relatively liberal interpretations of incapacity and make comparatively full use of the opportunity to provide aid to children when they are deprived of support or care by the parent's physical or mental disabilities.

In several States, the law for aid to dependent children requires that a child must be living in a home that is "suitable" or "satisfactory" or "beneficial to the upbringing of the child." Since suitability cannot be judged on the basis of wholly objective criteria, States have found this provision difficult to administer. Moreover, long-continued insufficiency of income is often the cause of undesirable home conditions. All States have laws to protect children from neglect and abuse. The Social Security Board believes that it is undesirable to use the power of the public assistance payment to enforce these laws, which are administered by other agencies. In some States, however, need exists for strengthening other governmental agencies which carry responsibility for protecting all neglected children regardless of economic status.

Although the Social Security Act does not require States to impose age limits or school attendance as conditions of eligibility for aid to dependent children, but merely prescribes such conditions for Federal matching, the majority of the State laws incorporate the provisions of the Federal act. One State gives the localities the option of aiding needy children 18 years of age and over, while 36 States aid children up to 18 years of age, and 12 States have set lower limits. Thirty-two States which aid children until age 18 require school attendance for children aged 16 or 17 years, and

1 State imposes school attendance for children aged 14 and 15.

Experience indicates that the cost of administering the school attendance clause is wholly out of proportion to any values it may have, and the Social Security Board believes that it should be deleted from both the Federal and the State acts. The clause was originally intended to encourage older boys and girls to remain in school. Unfortunately, it has resulted in depriving some needy children of aid. For a variety of reasons, children sometimes can neither go to school nor to work. In some rural areas, high schools are not accessible. Lack of vocational or specialized schools makes it unprofitable for some children with handicaps to attend school, and a few children are too handicapped to attend any school. Illness in the family, moreover, sometimes makes it necessary for older children to remain at home.

The Social Security Board is convinced that the complex of eligibility conditions for aid to dependent children in the Federal act is difficult to administer and seriously limits the ability of the States to achieve the socially desirable purpose of assisting children who are needy. Consequently, the Board believes that the Social Security Act should be amended to permit Federal matching of payments for any needy child regardless of the reason for his need if he is living with a relative or legal guardian in a home maintained as his own. Such an amendment would accomplish the dual purpose of enabling States to supply all needy children with the means of subsistence and of simplifying administration. A few State laws have already eliminated all conditions of eligibility except need, but these States still limit eligibility administratively to children for whom Federal matching can be obtained.

If Congress should authorize Federal participation in general assistance and also extend coverage for aid to dependent children to any needy child, the States could obtain Federal matching in payments to families with children under either program.

Extension of Coverage for Aid to the Blind

Though the Social Security Act au-

thorizes Federal matching in aid to the blind for needy blind persons of all ages, about half the States have a minimum age requirement for the receipt of assistance, ranging from 16 to 21 years. Needy blind children under age 16, or aged 16 or 17 and in school, can qualify for aid to dependent children under the conditions in the Federal act only if they are deprived of parental support or care by reason of death, absence from home, or incapacity of a parent. Most blind children in their own homes can now qualify only for general assistance if they are needy. The Social Security Board believes that all needy blind children should be eligible for aid to the blind.

Some States impose other conditions of eligibility for aid to the blind that are not required by the Federal act and that penalize the individual because of past or present behavior. A few States, for example, disqualify individuals who refuse treatment for the condition of blindness. Several States deny assistance to any applicant who "publicly solicits alms," although the number of such persons is negligible. Every eligibility condition adds to the expense and complexity of administration as well as to the degree of scrutiny to which all applicants must be subjected. Eligibility conditions such as these which affect very small numbers of persons do not seem to be worth retaining in the statutes.

Extension of Coverage for General Assistance

Although it is commonly presumed that general assistance is a residual program under which any needy person can qualify for assistance if he is ineligible for a special type of public assistance or requires additional aid to supplement such assistance, in many States certain groups of needy persons have no access to general assistance. Among groups now barred from general assistance in some places are nonsettled persons, noncitizens, single persons, persons receiving some other type of public assistance or a social insurance benefit, and so-called employables. Moreover, in some localities, no general assistance is administered.

The Social Security Board believes that the Federal Government should

make grants to States for general assistance just as it now does for old-age assistance, aid to dependent children, and aid to the blind. Even though no Federal funds are now available for general assistance, State legislatures can consider the scope and adequacy of their general assistance programs and take steps to make them more satisfactory. In States in which general assistance is wholly or largely a local responsibility, comprehensive State legislation providing for State supervision and financing may be necessary to assure that all needy persons in the State are both eligible for and able to get assistance. If comprehensive changes in State legislation are indicated, careful study may need to precede action. The Board suggests that, in a State whose legislature is not prepared to revise general assistance provisions fundamentally, steps should be taken, through a commission or otherwise, to formulate recommendations on which action can be based in the next biennium or at such time as Federal grants for general assistance may become available.

Improved Financing, Organization, and Administration

In many States, changes in financing, organization, and administration are needed to permit the assistance programs to operate with greater effectiveness. Among the most urgent problems of public assistance administration are the equitable distribution of Federal and State funds to localities, the centralization of administrative responsibility for all assistance programs in a single State agency and a single local agency, and the uniform application of policies, standards, and procedures throughout a State.

Equitable Distribution of Federal and State Funds Among Localities

The Social Security Board is of the opinion that special Federal aid to low-income States would enable the poorer States to put their public assistance programs more nearly on a par with those of the States which have greater economic resources. Just as there is need for equalizing the financial burden among States,

so there is need also for such equalization among the localities of a State. Federal and State funds should be allocated to localities so as to assure equitable treatment of needy individuals in all parts of the State. This is a problem in States without local financial participation as well as in the States where the localities contribute a share of the cost.

In States with local financing, the local contribution, although representing a small fraction of the total, is often the deciding factor in determining how many persons shall get assistance and how much; although the State and Federal Governments stand ready to match whatever the locality puts up, they cannot contribute more than their proportionate shares. Thus if the locality is unable to raise its share of the cost of an adequate program, inadequate payments or waiting lists are the inevitable result. This situation is tantamount to a denial of assistance. The Social Security Board is of the opinion that the poorer communities should get relatively more Federal and State funds than those with larger resources, and that in a Federal-State-local program needy persons should not have to suffer because they happen to live in a community which cannot readily raise a particular quota. Thus, wherever the localities participate in financing public assistance, the State should review the method of arriving at the local share to determine whether proper consideration is given to both the need for assistance and the financial ability of the locality. Unless funds are distributed in a way which assures equitable treatment of needy persons throughout the State, the objectives of the Federal-State-local partnership cannot be realized.

Unified Appropriations

The Congress now makes a single appropriation for grants to the States for the three special types of public assistance although the Board is still required by the Social Security Act to make a separate grant to a State for each program. The Social Security Board believes that one Federal grant covering all programs would be desirable, and that such a grant should provide funds both for assistance and administration. Grants for adminis-

tration should be on a uniform basis under all programs.

The Board is of the opinion that financing of the State public assistance programs is both strengthened and facilitated if a single appropriation is made from the general fund of the State for assistance and administration under all programs. About one-fourth of the States now make such appropriations for assistance. On the other hand, some States appropriate funds separately for each program, and sometimes States finance different programs from different tax sources. A single lump-sum appropriation from the general fund permits sounder financial planning, eliminates uncertainties concerning the yield of earmarked taxes, and permits maximum flexibility in the use of available moneys. In some States, public assistance agencies now find themselves in the anomalous position of having unexpended balances in one appropriation, and in another, insufficient funds to enable them to meet recipients' needs.

One State and One Local Agency

The effectiveness of public assistance administration in some States would be increased by unifying administration at the State level. In many States, further unification of administration at the local level would be desirable.

The Social Security Act now requires that one State agency administer or supervise the administration of a specified program, but it does not require that all programs be administered by the same State agency. Nor does the act require coordinated local administration of old-age assistance, aid to dependent children, and aid to the blind.

Many States have found it desirable to go beyond the requirements of the act and have established one State and one local agency to be responsible for the special types of public assistance. Only a few States still continue to administer one of the special types of public assistance apart from the other two. Notable progress, moreover, has been made in coordinating the administration or supervision of general assistance with that of the special types of public assistance. Yet two States and large numbers of localities assign re-

sponsibility for general assistance to an agency other than that responsible for the programs for the aged, blind, and children.

States have found numerous advantages in placing responsibility for all public assistance programs in one agency. Not only is coordinated planning and financing of the programs facilitated, but a greater degree of harmony among programs can be achieved in policies, procedures, and standards. Such similarity should result in more nearly equitable treatment of needy individuals regardless of the type of assistance for which they are eligible. Although the intent of the Social Security Act is to assure equitable treatment of all needy individuals within a State who are eligible for a particular type of assistance, the act does not undertake to assure equity among programs—an objective that the Board believes desirable. State and local agencies administering a unified assistance system would have a complete picture of the needs of all groups and thus would be stimulated to extend the principle of equitable treatment so that all need, regardless of type, would be met on as equitable a basis as possible.

Unified administration has the further advantage of permitting operating economies and, even more important, of affording better service to recipients. When one agency is responsible for all types of public assistance, all requests for aid are received at a central intake office and the individual requesting aid can get the appropriate type of assistance to meet his particular wants promptly and without the necessity of going from agency to agency. Moreover, the needs of a family may be considered as a whole; if more than one type of aid is required, one agency can provide all the assistance and duplicate

investigations may be avoided. At the same time, under unified administration specialized services to individual members of a family may be provided, when needed, as effectively as under a program separately administered.

Uniform Application of Policies and Standards

The Board believes that similar treatment of individuals in similar circumstances is a fundamental principle in the administration of public assistance. To strive toward this goal, State agencies should adopt uniform policies, standards, and procedures and should make every effort to have them fully understood by State and local personnel, applicants, and the general public.

The needs of recipients will vary in different localities, but the basis for determining the amount of assistance should be uniform throughout the State. In many States, there is wide variation among localities in standards for requirements and in policies for the treatment of resources. Uniform standards and policies for determining the amount of assistance—and effective State supervision in their application—are basic to good administration.

Other essentials of equitable treatment are uniform intake policies and procedures, prompt disposition of applications, and assurance of effective procedures for a fair hearing for individuals whose claims are denied. Basically, these objectives can be attained only through good administration.

The Board recommends that State legislatures provide legislative authority wherever it is not clear that the State agency has responsibility for meeting the needs of recipients throughout the State on a fair and equitable basis.

Conclusion

Responsibility for administering the State-Federal programs of old-age assistance, aid to dependent children, and aid to the blind rests with the States and localities. The Federal role in these programs is to approve State plans for their operation under the Social Security Act, to determine the conformity of administration to State plans, to certify Federal grants, to assist States to develop adequate public assistance programs, and to study the effectiveness of the programs for the purpose of making recommendations for Federal legislation and guiding administrative policy.

Since the Federal Government is a financial partner in the special types of public assistance, States are limited to some extent in the development of their programs by the Federal matching provisions. Although few States, if any, are taking full advantage of the provisions for Federal matching in the Social Security Act, many States have already gone beyond the matching limits of the act in some respects, extending coverage to groups not now eligible for Federal matching, broadening the scope of assistance to include medical and other services, and making payments in excess of the Federal matching maximums. Some States, moreover, are moving toward the establishment of a truly integrated public assistance system, with unified financing and administration of the special types of public assistance and general assistance at both State and local levels. The States have continuing opportunity to blaze the trail in defining new goals and devising better methods of public assistance administration. The 1945 legislative sessions afford the States occasion for promoting greater understanding and obtaining increased support of measures necessary to banish want within their borders.