



# AT ISSUE

## Providing Government Services Today

6.149 Examples of services provided by government



We have seen in this chapter that access to government services can improve the standard of living for local residents. Consider, for example, how much more difficult life was for people in the 1920s and 1930s than it was in later decades, when the Commission and provincial governments made a wider range of social services available to the public. Health care improved and became more affordable. So did education.

After Confederation, people in this province became eligible for federal and provincial social assistance programs. These included family allowances, war veteran allowances, unemployment insurance, and old age pensions. By the end of the 1960s, paved roads were commonplace on the island and many homes had access to electricity, running water, and sewage systems.

Today, we continue to benefit from services and programs delivered by the federal, provincial, and

municipal governments. Governments provide citizens with clean running water, paved roads, public transit systems, ferry services, schools, textbooks\*, pensions, employment insurance, hospitals, subsidized medical services, garbage collection, recycling programs, snow clearing, parklands, fire departments, museums, galleries, archives, and many other valuable resources.

Services such as these enrich our lives, but they are also very costly. Governments generally pay for them

*\*Including the textbook you are reading right now!*

#### 6.150 Some of the services provided by each level of government

MUNICIPAL	PROVINCIAL	FEDERAL
Garbage collection	Hospitals	Employment Insurance program
Snow clearing	Education	Canada Pension Plan program
Fire fighting	Policing (RNC)	Policing (RCMP)
Water purification	Ferry services	Justice
Road and sidewalk maintenance (including signs and traffic signals)	Provincial airstrips operation and maintenance	Airport control (airport authorities)
Recreation facilities operation and maintenance (eg, parks and playgrounds)	Provincial parks operation and maintenance	Ports control (port authorities)
	Highway construction	Food inspection
		Public sites operation (eg, historic sites, national museums, national parks, national galleries)

with the tax dollars they collect from local residents and businesses. However, the tremendous expense of maintaining multiple programs means that governments cannot afford to deliver an equal number of services to all communities. Often, cities and towns with the largest populations receive the most services because they have the largest tax bases.

In rural areas, people pay less property and other taxes than they do in urban areas. This means that municipal governments in small communities have relatively little

money to spend on new roads, bridges, electricity lines, and other public services. It is also less economical for the provincial and federal governments to maintain schools, health-care facilities, and other resources in places with small and scattered populations. Generally, the lower the population density, the higher the per capita cost of delivering public services. Retaining adequate numbers of teachers, doctors, nurses, and other professionals in remote settlements is another challenge.





Administering hundreds of sparsely populated settlements dispersed over a wide area has been a recurring problem for Newfoundland and Labrador governments. Different solutions have been tried over the decades with varying degrees of success. In 1935, for example, the Commission of Government created the Newfoundland Ranger Force to provide government services in isolated and northern areas.

After Confederation, the government sponsored resettlement programs to encourage rural residents to move to larger growth centres. By bringing the population together, government officials hoped to deliver better public services more affordably. However, many of the people who resettled were disappointed by their economic and social circumstances after

the move and struggled to adjust to life in their new communities. Others were angry that hundreds of settlements disappeared under the programs; they felt that resettlement was a betrayal of the culture and traditions that made Newfoundland and Labrador distinct.

Today, many rural communities are faced with the problem of maintaining tax bases that are large enough to afford necessary public services. Communities that are able to do so are referred to as economically sustainable. Often, small communities must decide to go without certain services so that they can afford other, more essential ones. Neighbouring municipalities may also decide to jointly pay for services they can then share – such as regional water systems or garbage

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collection. Cooperation between the various levels of government can also help communities remain economically sustainable. Cost-sharing with the provincial and federal governments, for example, makes it easier for some municipalities to afford a

wider range of programs and services, such as water treatment, solid waste management, road building, and public transit. Government officials may also introduce salary increases and other incentives to attract doctors, teachers, and other professionals to rural areas.

## ***For Discussion:***

1. People in Newfoundland and Labrador have access to a greater range of government services today than they did in the 1930s. Would this make it easier for local families to withstand another Great Depression? Explain your answer.
2. List some of the public services to which your community has access. Rank them by what you consider to be their order of importance. Discuss why you believe some services are more or less important than others.
3. Why do larger towns and cities often have a greater number of public services and programs than smaller communities? Do you believe this makes sense? Explain your answer.
4. Would you want to move to a larger centre where more government services and programs existed? Would you want to move to a smaller community where fewer services existed? Why or why not?
5. If you were a member of the provincial government, how would you try to give rural residents greater access to public services?

## ***Questions:***

1. Consider your daily routine (brushing your teeth, driving to school, etc.). How many of your activities are made easier by public services such as municipal water supplies and paved roads?
2. How would your life change if the government stopped providing public services?
3. How has greater access to public services made your life different from your parents' lives when they were your age? Your grandparents?
4. Why is it difficult for some rural communities to maintain tax bases that are large enough to pay for essential services?