

DIVISION OF MEDICAL BENEFITS

This section of the report mainly concerns itself with an account of the expenditure involved in administering the health-benefits section of the Social Security Act. Some remarks are, however, necessary regarding the functional side of medical care in New Zealand. A perusal of the statement regarding the various benefits to follow will demonstrate that the people of New Zealand have benefited considerably since the introduction of the various benefits. It is true that under the present system there is an ill-balanced distribution of medical practitioners and that the services provided in many cases may be difficult to obtain and sometimes of indifferent quality because of excessive demands on practitioners. Nevertheless, a great majority of the population are receiving services which they were unable to afford in the past. There is still, however, much to be accomplished. A better distribution of practitioners is necessary. The present shortage of specialists should be overcome and specialist services of all kinds be readily available wherever required at the cost of Social Security Funds. The merging of curative and preventive medicine, now known as social medicine, should be achieved, and health centres which are necessary for this type of service should also be provided. From the functional side there is therefore much to be achieved in improving and extending the various types of medical care that are necessary for New Zealand.

Regarding the cost of benefits, the total expenditure for the past year, as well as that for each section, with its equivalent percentage of the whole, is tabulated below :—

				Amount.	Percentage.
				£	
(1) Maternity benefits	..	..	..	672,989	10·8
(2) Medical benefits	..	..	..	1,760,574	28·3
(3) Hospital benefits	..	..	..	1,986,288	32·0
(4) Pharmaceutical benefits	..	..	..	1,439,686	23·2
(5) Supplementary benefits	..	..	..	352,043	5·7
				£6,211,580	

(1) MATERNITY BENEFITS

This section accounts for 10·8 per cent. of the total expenditure. The expenditure under this section has increased by £72,780 since the last report. As this increase is undoubtedly due to an increase in the birth-rate, it is the most comforting feature of this report. It is to be noted that the increases apply to attendance in public hospital maternity annexes and to the professional services of medical practitioners only. The present difficulties of private maternity hospitals is reflected in a reduction of expenditure in this section, due, no doubt, to the reduced number of beds available in such institutions.

(2) MEDICAL BENEFITS

This section accounts for 28·3 per cent. of the total expenditure. Apart from payments to medical practitioners for professional services to maternity patients, this section represents all the remaining expenditure involved in payments to general medical practitioners.

Capitation.—The expenditure under this subsection has again decreased. This is not due to any inherent defect in the capitation system, because, for obvious financial reasons, a capitation system cannot survive in contact with the alternative fee-for-service system.