



Life

as we
know it

A brief look at
how much we
depend on the
public sector to
make it through
our days—all day,
every day.





Life as we know it in Canada would end without the public sector.

Just look around: the plain fact of life for all of us is the public sector in Canada is central to making our life just the way we like it. This isn't an ideological, political or academic theory. It's just the plain truth about the day-to-day reality we all live in—all day, every day.

Another fact of life for most of us is that we hardly ever think about how much we depend on our public services. We're just too busy. We work hard, play by the rules and do our best to get ahead. We expect the services and programs we need and want to be there when we need and want them. And they are. So, it's no surprise we tend to take them for granted.

The long payoff

Another reason the public sector fades from our day-to-day attention is that the benefits provided by the public sector aren't always immediate and tangible. It's not like buying a big screen television at Future Shop and taking it home to watch the hockey game that night. A lot of the benefits from our public sector don't offer that kind of instant gratification. Many of our public sector benefits only pay off in the long term and are pretty much invisible to us most of the time.

Many people associate their taxes with health care and education. But they wouldn't think about the benefits they get years down the road from government investments in things like basic science research, water conservation and purifying technologies, clean air standards, a strategic economic development strategy or a poverty reduction plan.

A lot of what the public sector does is to protect us from potential harm. So we never actually see the benefits—because we never get hurt. For example, you go for a swim at the local beach and bite into your hamburger at the backyard BBQ and don't get an E. Coli infection because government regulations and public health inspectors are doing their jobs.

Corporate distractions

And then there are the corporate-funded special interest groups. Over the last 25 years, they've waged a relentless smear campaign against the public sector. Their incessant propaganda tells people the public sector is full of waste and can't possibly play a constructive or compassionate role in our society and economy. No wonder so many people don't believe they get much in return for the taxes they pay.

But that's totally wrong, of course. The proof is around us every day. You just have to review a typical day in the life of an ordinary Canadian family and the truth becomes obvious: the public sector oils the wheels of daily life in Canada.

A day in your life

Morning

6:00 a.m. The alarm on your electric clock radio wakes you up. The electricity comes from a public utility company. ■ A new song by an up and coming Canadian band is playing. You don't realize it (or even think about it because it's so early in the morning!) but the song is being played in part because the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission policies and regulations ensure that Canadian songs are played on Canadian radio stations. Who knows: this could be the next Canadian band to make it big on the international scene.



6:15 a.m. You go downstairs to get a cold glass of water. The water is clean and safe because of provincial regulations and public employees who are constantly testing and treating drinking water quality. ■ You flip on the television to catch up on the news. The first story is about a government stimulus package to create jobs and prevent an economic depression. The second story is about a new national pandemic plan to prevent and prepare for an outbreak of a new deadly virus that has been detected in another country. In local news, the police caught two people responsible for a string of car thefts in your neighbourhood and more than 130 firefighters were called on to battle an overnight blaze at a local hardware store that spewed toxic smoke. You flip the channel to catch up on what's been happening in sports. Will the Toronto Maple Leafs ever make the playoffs? You give no thought to the fact that the news stories you just heard all involve the direct benefits of a strong public sector.



6:30 a.m. It's garbage day so you put out the trash and recycling and don't think twice about how publicly funded garbage services will pick it up, transport it and ensure it is disposed of in an environmentally friendly manner. ■ You head out for your morning run. Your usual course takes you through a lovely local park. You're thinking about the long day ahead of you and not the fact that the park exists because local zoning regulations required it to be built. And it is maintained by public employees.

7:00 a.m. Back from your run, you jump in the shower. You don't even think twice that the water will be transported through a sewage infrastructure system that was built using money from a government infrastructure fund or that it will be treated and disposed of at a local sewage treatment plant built and maintained with tax dollars. ■ You jump out of the shower and blow-dry your hair. There's no problem with the electrical line because it was installed and inspected by a professional electrician who was trained at a high-quality public community college. The electrician was also certified and licensed by a government mandated regulatory body.

7:30 a.m. Now it's time to get the kids ready for school. Before suggesting what clothes they should wear, you check to see what the weather is going to be like today. The reports are provided by highly-trained meteorologists at Environment Canada, a federal department that has been issuing regular weather forecasts and severe weather warnings since 1871. At the moment, this fact isn't important because you're preoccupied with getting the kids to stop fooling around and focus on getting dressed for school. ■ You make the kids cereal and toast for breakfast. You review the nutritional information about these products – thanks to food labeling requirements mandated by the government. This is especially important because one of your kids has a severe nut allergy.



8:00 a.m. You help get the kids on the school bus. You don't think twice about the public sector role in this small part of your day. But the bus is funded by tax dollars and the bus driver has been tested and licensed according to standards set by the government. ■ With the kids safely off, you drive to work. You feel good knowing your kids are attending a local public school that has quality teachers and provides a safe and nurturing environment. You smile to yourself when you recall how excited one of your kids is about going on her first field trip to the publicly funded Museum of Science and Technology. (You're also relieved that you weren't asked to be a parent supervisor on this trip!)



8:15 a.m. On your drive to work, you stop at Tim Hortons for a coffee. You order the usual large double-double. But it's never occurred to you: how can I be sure this cup contains the amount of coffee that Tim Hortons says it does? Well, you don't need to worry about

it because that's the job of public employees at Measurement Canada which is a division of Industry Canada. They are responsible for measuring products in the marketplace and ensuring companies provide the quantity advertised. ■ Another thing you don't think much about is whether Tim Hortons is colluding with Starbucks to keep the price of coffee artificially high. That's because anti-competition laws and public employees at the Competition Bureau of Canada prevent this from happening.



8:30 a.m. Driving in your car to work on a provincial highway provides many examples of the benefits of the public sector. The highway was built with tax dollars and the maintenance, and the inspection of roads and bridges, is paid for with public dollars and the work is usually done by public employees. Sometimes you complain about government intrusion in

your life but the reality is that your trip is safer thanks to regulations mandating seat belts, air bags, child safety seats and regular overall safety inspections.

■ Your trip is also made safer thanks to highway traffic laws, highway maintenance officers who inspect and maintain the roads and bridges, and highway safety officers who inspect transport trucks to ensure they meet safety standards.



9:00 a.m. You arrive at work and take the elevator up to your floor. You wonder what it would be

like if your elevator ever got stuck and you had to be rescued. But that's never actually happened thanks in part to the fact that the elevator is regulated by the government and public dollars pay to have it inspected regularly. ■ Your workplace provides many examples of the benefits of the public sector. Workplace health and safety laws help protect you from having to work in a place without enough light or fresh, clean air. ■ If you're ever hurt on the job, you'll receive some assistance from the provincial Workers Compensation Insurance Board which employers must pay into by law. ■ Labour laws regulate how many hours in a day and week your employer can make you work and must provide overtime if you work more. ■ Provincial laws protect you from harassment and discrimination based on race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or disability. ■ If you are ever laid off from your job, you will receive benefits from the social program known as Employment Insurance – although more people should qualify for this program and the benefits should be more generous.



Noon

12:00 p.m. You've had a busy morning and you set out to do a few errands before meeting a friend for lunch. First, you drop a letter in the Canada Post mailbox. For less than the price of a cup of coffee, a Canada Post employee will pick up your letter and have it delivered to your sister who lives on the other side of the country.



■ Then you stop at the bank to make a few transactions. You pick up a brochure that outlines how your deposits are insured by the federal government. That reminds you of an article you read recently about how Canada's banks have done okay through the current global economic crisis because they're highly regulated by the federal government – unlike in the U.S. and Europe. However, you also mutter under your breath that you'd like to see stronger regulations on credit card interest rates! ■ You meet your friend at a nearby restaurant. You can be sure your sandwich is safe to eat thanks to regulations on the raising and production of livestock. And, of course, public health inspectors visit restaurants on a regular basis to ensure the restaurant is handling food in a safe manner and the facility is clean.

3:30 p.m. You need to leave work early for a doctor's appointment because your knee has been bothering you recently. You see the doctor and are not charged anything. The doctor will receive payment from the government later. ■ She reviews your diagnostic tests which were done by highly-trained public sector health science professionals. She prescribes an anti-inflammatory prescription drug. ■ The drug has gone through an extensive testing and approval process managed by Health Canada. Of course, none of this matters to you right now. You're just glad there's been a diagnosis and the doctor has prescribed some drugs to help deal with the pain!





Night

5:00 p.m. You pick up your kids at the after school program. It's operated by your municipal government and that makes it more affordable and available to more families. It's usually a bit chaotic when you pick the kids up. But you're happy with the supervisor to student ratios, the nutritional breaks, and the space and safety requirements – all of these things are mandated by government regulation.

6:00 p.m. After a quick dinner, you take the kids to their swimming lessons. They're held in a facility owned by your local government. The lessons are affordable for many families because they are provided by the city. The young lifeguards are also employed by the city. Public employees keep the facility clean and the water quality is great because they're constantly monitoring and testing it.

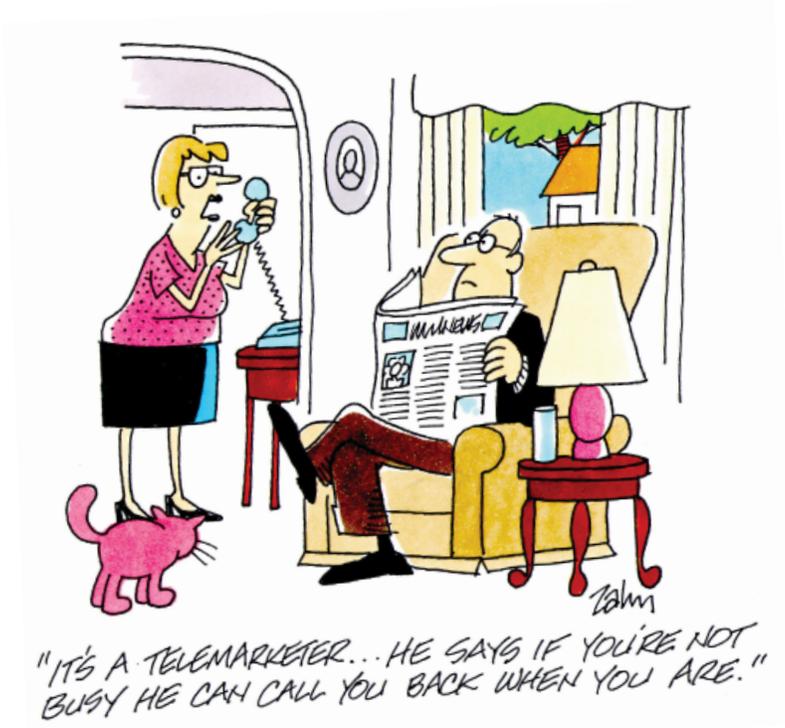
7:30 p.m. Back at home you call your mom. She'd love to take a two-week vacation in Florida this year and is looking for your advice on how to budget for it. One of the foundations of her budget is the benefits she's receiving from the Canada Pension Plan and Old Age Security. You both agree it's great to be able to count on these benefits – though your mom comments it would be nice if the benefits were a bit higher. ■ You ask your mom about her health. She's getting over a recent bout with pneumonia. She received good care at the local hospital and is now receiving care at home. A home care worker visits every few days to make sure her mobile IV is working properly. All of these expenses are covered by the public



health care system so she doesn't have to worry about it becoming a financial disaster.

8:00 p.m. After you get off the phone, it's time to put the kids to bed. It's been a long day for everyone and you'll also be hitting the sack soon. It occurs to you that you've actually had fewer annoying calls from telemarketers (they usually call at this time of night) since you signed up for the federal government's Do Not Call List.

10:00 p.m. Everyone is sleeping soundly. The family is protected by a smoke detector that the government requires to be installed in every residence. If disaster occurs, public sector paramedics and firefighters are waiting and ready to help you.



These are just a few examples of how all our lives are bound up with the benefits we expect and receive from a strong public sector—all day, every day.

All of these good things are provided by the public sector because we Canadians believe in building a country where people care for each other (not just themselves) and act responsibly for each other based on important values like equality, fairness and opportunity.

It's important that we do what we can to remind ourselves and others about how specific public sector programs, services and regulations support and protect people every day.

We must also provide a vigorous defence of the general notion that the public sector plays a constructive and compassionate role in our society and economy.

Finally, it's essential that we work together to build a movement that can push politicians to promote and support a strong public sector in Canada.

*Please join the **All Together Now!** campaign. It offers many ways you can get involved. Join the conversation and help set the record straight.*

Get involved! Join the conversation!



- Get resources on the campaign website
<http://alltogethernow.nupge.ca>
- Book a presentation from one of our *Champions 4 Change*
<http://alltogethernow.nupge.ca/book-presentation>
- Become a *Writer 4 Change*
<http://alltogethernow.nupge.ca/become-writer-4-change>
- Join the campaign on Facebook
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- Send Prime Minister Harper a letter and win \$100
<http://alltogethernow.nupge.ca/write-letter>