

Healthcare

The welfare state

The United Kingdom

William Beveridge's 1942 Report on the "five giant evils" that crippled Britain (namely Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness) was released to provide a sweeping system of **social security**. People would pay a contribution (taken from their salaries) in exchange of which they would be entitled to state benefits if unemployed, sick, retired or widowed. The model for a welfare state had appeared, meant to protect people "from the cradle to the grave", and in which **the state plays a major part** to protect and promote the well-being of citizens. The **National Health Service**, created in 1948, would guarantee free health care to all citizens regardless of their income. The safety-net commitment has been preserved, however, governments argue that the **cost of social security** is unsustainable.

During the Thatcher years, the idea that people, not the state, should be **accountable**, started to emerge, for fear benefits might stifle **personal responsibility** and discourage job-seekers. Nevertheless, in view of the escalating costs, both Conservative and Labour governments have tried to slash costs.

The United States

In 1935, **Franklin D Roosevelt's New Deal** instituted social insurance policies, and, in 1965, **Medicare** (for elderly people) and **Medicaid** (for poor people) were set up to offer social protection to those who might need it temporarily.

Before March 2010, when the **Patient Care Affordable Care Act** (aka **Obamacare**) was signed into law by President Obama, not all Americans had health coverage, which made the ACA one of the major social breakthroughs since the New Deal. The three main provisions of the law revolve around **individual obligation to buy health insurance**, the setting up of **state health exchanges** and the **expansion of Medicaid**.

However, Republican opposition turned some provisos into an uphill battle, and again raised the question of how to best serve the collective good without too much **state interference**.

The **debate on the welfare state** has been the **fault line between liberalism and interventionism** since the 19th century, the two conceptions of government being still pitted against each other when an ageing population, the costs of new drugs and treatments and lifestyle factors contribute to **escalating health care expenditure**.

1. Basics

Healthcare: the act of taking medical procedures for the prevention, the treatment, or the management of illness to improve or preserve a person's physical or mental well-being. A set of services is typically offered through a **healthcare system** (also known as **health system**) and **health policies** established to meet the health needs of target populations.

2. Non-conditional healthcare

The Welfare State: William Beveridge's 1942 Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services was essential in the founding of the Welfare State in the UK. Beveridge proposed a reform to the system of social welfare to address five "Giant Evils" in society: squalor, ignorance, want, idleness, and disease.

Subsequent pieces of legislation: the 1946 National Insurance Act (provided for compulsory contributions for unemployment, sickness, maternity and widows' benefits, and old age pensions); the 1948 National Assistance Act (established a social safety net for the homeless, the physically handicapped, and unmarried mothers left uncovered by the aforementioned Act); the **National Health Service, aka NHS** (created by Aneurin Bevan, Minister of Health under Prime Minister Clement Attlee, in 1948; it provided access to a general practitioner, to hospital care, and to local authority services).

Universal healthcare: whenever, in a state, a healthcare system provides access to health services and financial risk protection to all people. The *Sécurité sociale* in France is a case in point.

3. Conditional and excessive healthcare

Workfare: Conservatives consider that the government's role is to empower people and keep them out of idleness; unemployed and disabled people must work in return for their welfare benefits. Presidents Nixon and Reagan, and more recently UK former PM David Cameron, wanted to curb government intervention in welfare provision and make it **conditional** unlike New Labour governments in the UK (under T. Blair and G. Brown) and B. Obama in the US.

Nanny State or "nannyism" (≠ night-watchman state): whenever a government has **excessive** control over the welfare of its citizens, especially when enforcing public health regulations (the taxing of unhealthy foods to fight obesity, minimum alcohol pricing to reduce binge drinking, the passing of anti-smoking legislation...).

4. Private health insurance

A private health insurance pays patients' medical bills if they are treated privately, outside the NHS in the UK or governmental programs like **Medicare** or **Medicaid** in the US. Premiums are paid directly from employers or individuals to insurance companies.