

State of the City: Welfare and Hospitals

Two distinguishing marks of the city's humanitarian spirit—its welfare system and its municipal hospitals—have turned into plague areas, wasteful of public funds and destructive of people. In both fields New York has pioneered, out of recognition of governmental responsibility to care for those who cannot care for themselves. In both, the end results have been disastrous—for community and clients alike.

The recession has pushed welfare back into its unwelcome place as the city's biggest growth industry. Checks from the Department of Social Services and the Federal Supplemental Security Income program for the needy aged, blind and disabled—plus Medicaid—now provide the essentials of survival for a record 1.3 million persons here. By the end of the 1975-76 fiscal year, officials expect the number of New Yorkers receiving public assistance to reach 1.5 million—nearly one-fifth of the population—at a combined cost in Federal, state and local funds of almost \$5 billion.

In whole neighborhoods, especially in the black and Puerto Rican slums, the concentration of welfare families is mirrored in social decay, even though the average allowance to a family of four in cash, medical services and food stamps amounts to more than \$100 a week. Every metropolitan malady, from street crime to venereal disease, finds its harshest expression in these welfare communities.

More than half of those on the rolls are children, growing up in an environment of deprivation and defeat, the bulk of them in fatherless homes. Indeed, welfare itself has contributed to the break-up of intact families, partly because of eligibility restrictions on families with employable fathers and partly because the full-time earnings of many unskilled workers do not equal subsistence payments on relief. Ten thousand family heads with jobs are currently receiving supplementary welfare checks; an indeterminate number of others in low-paid jobs simply disappear, leaving the whole burden of family support to the community.