

## 12.2A Into the twenty-first century

There is almost no-one in Britain who isn't helped at some time or another by the **welfare state**. This is the name of the system by which the government aims to help those in need, mainly the old, the sick, the unemployed and children. You and your family will almost certainly have been helped out by this system at one time or another. Sometimes also known as 'social security', the welfare state aims to ensure that nobody goes without food, shelter, clothing, medical care, education or any other basic need simply because they can't afford it. How did Britain develop into a welfare state in the twentieth century? What are the issues for public health in the twenty-first century?

### Objectives

- ▶ Examine the impact of the two world wars on public health.
- ▶ Explore the concept of the welfare state and the development of the NHS.
- ▶ Evaluate the impact of the NHS.
- ▶ Explore the costs, choices and issues relating to healthcare in the twenty-first century.

◀ The twentieth century saw the government accept the need to care for its citizens 'from the cradle to the grave'; this diagram gives a basic outline of how the welfare state in Britain works

### Welfare state



### Before the two world wars

Although we take things illustrated in diagram A for granted today, it is not a system that has been in place for many years. Before the twentieth century, the most vulnerable people in society relied on help from charity organisations, such as the Salvation Army, or from their local church. Those who were in absolute poverty ended up in **workhouses**: large, cold, intimidating buildings where people had to work for their food and accommodation.

From 1906, a few years after the Boer War ended, the government introduced some help for the most vulnerable sections of society: free school meals for poorer children, free school medical check-ups and treatment, small old-age pensions for the over 70s, and basic sick and 'dole' pay. But this was not on the same scale as what was introduced after the two world wars.

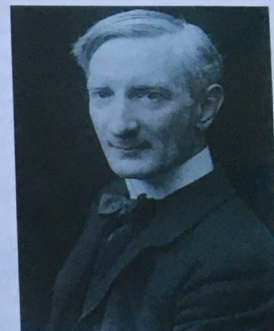
▼ **SOURCE B** Speaking in 2006, Ivy Green from Nottingham remembers medical care in the 1930s:

You paid National Insurance as soon as you got a job. We called it 'the stamp' and it worked like any insurance policy does today. You paid a set amount each week into a central fund and this entitled you to some basic sick pay and care from a 'panel doctor' if you were ill ... but because you only paid your stamp if you had a job, it meant you missed out on doctor's care when you lost your job. So when there was high unemployment in the 1930s, loads of people were unable to get any medical treatment because they hadn't been paying their stamp. You could pay for a doctor to visit you - six pence I think. It wasn't a lot of money but it still made you think twice about calling him. I'm sure lots of people mustn't have bothered to call a doctor because of the money.

### Key Words

welfare state workhouse

▼ **SOURCE C** Sir William Beveridge (1879-1963)



### The Labour government

As the Second World War ended, an election was held to decide who would run the country after the war. The Labour Party promised to follow Beveridge's advice, while the Conservative Party, led by Winston Churchill, refused to make such a promise. The Labour Party won the election easily - and Winston Churchill, the man who had led Britain during the war, was out of power.

### Impact of the two world wars on public health

The death and destruction of the two world wars didn't just have an impact on people's lives - it had a major impact on attitudes too. It wasn't just the men fighting at the front that were dying; many people back in Britain suffered too, from shortages and bombing attacks. People felt that the sacrifices made at home and abroad should mean that the future should be a lot better for them. They felt that a better, fairer healthcare system should be part of this. And many middle-class people in the countryside had been genuinely shocked by the state of some of the dirty, under-nourished children who had been evacuated out of the cities during the Second World War. They felt that winning the wars should mean a better future for them too.

### Beveridge Report

Towards the end of the Second World War, Sir William Beveridge wrote a report about the state of Britain. The Beveridge Report [1942] said that people all over the country had a right to be free of the 'five giants' that could ruin their lives:

- disease
- want (need)
- ignorance
- idleness
- squalor (very poor living conditions).

The report suggested ways to improve quality of life, and said that the government should 'take charge of social security from the cradle to the grave'. In a nation where people hoped that life would be better once the war was over, the report became a surprise bestseller, selling over 100,000 copies in its first month of publication.

### Work

- 1 In your own words, describe how the most vulnerable people in society were looked after before the Second World War.
- 2 a Explain what is meant by the term 'welfare state'.  
b What was the Beveridge Report?  
c In your own words, explain what you think was meant when the report said that the government should 'take charge of social security from the cradle to the grave'.