

Effect of provincial spending on social services and health care on health outcomes in Canada ^[1]

An observational longitudinal study

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AVAILABILITY

Full article PDF ^[2]

ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: Escalating health care spending is a concern in Western countries, given the lack of evidence of a direct connection between spending and improvements in health. We aimed to determine the association between spending on health care and social programs and health outcomes in Canada.

METHODS: We used retrospective data from Canadian provincial expenditure reports, for the period 1981 to 2011, to model the effects of social and health spending (as a ratio, social/health) on potentially avoidable mortality, infant mortality and life expectancy. We used linear regressions, accounting for provincial fixed effects and time, and controlling for confounding variables at the provincial level.

RESULTS: A 1-cent increase in social spending per dollar spent on health was associated with a 0.1% (95% confidence interval [CI] 0.04% to 0.16%) decrease in potentially avoidable mortality and a 0.01% (95% CI 0.01% to 0.02%) increase in life expectancy. The ratio had a statistically nonsignificant relationship with infant mortality ($p = 0.2$).

INTERPRETATION: Population-level health outcomes could benefit from a reallocation of government dollars from health to social spending, even if total government spending were left unchanged. This result is consistent with other findings from Canada and the United States.

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