



# Advocacy for People with MS



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# Introduction

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This booklet helps people with MS in two ways:

- Provides guidance on advocating on your own behalf
- Provides suggestions for communicating with lawyers, doctors, and politicians

This booklet is one in a series of five that have been developed by the Volunteer Legal Advocacy Program (VLAP).

Other booklets available:

- MS and Human Rights
- Disability Insurance
- Canada Pension Plan Disability Benefits
- Community and Legal Resources

Booklets are available at [www.mssociety.ca/bc/vlap.htm](http://www.mssociety.ca/bc/vlap.htm) or from the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada, BC & Yukon Division office.

VLAP provides a range of legal and advocacy support to people living with MS throughout British Columbia and the Yukon by utilizing volunteers who have legal expertise and/or advocacy experience.

Pro bono legal representation is available in specific legal areas of expertise in several communities throughout the BC & Yukon Division. Please contact the BC & Yukon Division office for details.

## CHAPTER 1

# Forms of Advocacy

### **Advocacy**

Advocacy is providing support or argument for a cause. Advocates can support or act on behalf of another individual or group, or empower the individual or group to become self-advocates. Advocates help people help themselves.

### **Self-Advocacy**

When you advocate on your own behalf, you are a self-advocate. This means taking the steps necessary to initiate change and achieve a goal, whether that goal is to get information, obtain a service, or change a policy. You may not be acting alone, but you are spearheading the effort.

Advocating for yourself is an important step in educating others about your needs and abilities, and empowering yourself. It is a significant step toward furthering equality and protecting your human rights as a person with a disability.

### **Peer Advocacy**

Peer advocacy involves people from a specific group, (like people with disabilities), assisting others from that group in achieving a desired change. Assistance they provide may range from finding information, to accompanying a person to a meeting, to lobbying a government official.

### **Social Action**

Systemic or community advocacy is sometimes referred to as social action. This kind of advocacy involves working on behalf of many people who want something to change. It involves lobbying for changes to the “systems” that impact

us. Community advocacy or social action initiatives may be directed at changing legislation, policies, practices, opportunities, or attitudes on a very large scale. It almost always involves raising public awareness and consciousness about an issue, bringing individuals and groups together for mutual support, information sharing and coalition-building, and taking collective action directed at changing the issue. Examples of this include efforts to change Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPP-D) eligibility criteria and lobbying the provincial government to increase disability benefits.

### **Volunteer Legal Advocacy Program (VLAP)**

VLAP is another example of community advocacy or social action. VLAP provides:

- Booklets of information to help you advocate on your own behalf
- Referrals to a volunteer advocate to help with CPP-D benefits, long-term disability, and other general advocacy issues
- Consultation with a lawyer for issues in which you require legal help provided you meet our eligibility criteria

## CHAPTER 2

# Effective Self-Advocacy

### **Know Your Rights and Facts**

In order to advocate on your own behalf, you need to be aware of your rights and of the facts concerning your situation. To learn about your rights you can:

- Read relevant material on policies, programs, and appeal processes.
- Contact the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada, British Columbia & Yukon Division.
- Contact another advocacy or disability organization.
- Talk to others who have experienced similar issues.

Be sure that your sources of information are credible and that the information you have can be confirmed.

Equally important to learning about your rights is the gathering of all facts surrounding your situation.

### **Know Yourself**

Two other requirements of self-advocacy are self-awareness and self-care. You know your body better than others do and therefore you know when to rest. You know how best to prepare psychologically for a meeting or confrontation. If you have been treated unfairly or you have been labeled in some way because you have MS, your self-confidence and self-esteem may be so eroded that you have begun to doubt yourself and your abilities. In addition, your symptoms may be exacerbated. Respect your limits and acknowledge your physical, emotional, and spiritual strengths as you embark on the process of seeking change.

## **Know Your Goals**

Be very clear about what it is you want to achieve through your efforts. Set a clear goal and acknowledge when you have reached it so that you do not misdirect valuable time, energy, and resources.

## **Arrange Consent**

If anyone is going to assist you with your case, be sure to give them permission to obtain documents that pertain to you. Written or verbal permission (often called consent) is necessary before anyone can act on another person's behalf in obtaining documents or discussing personal information.

## **Be Organized**

Being organized will help you to reach your goals. Keep all of your pertinent information in one place. Make sure you have copies of documents for yourself and for others who may need to see them. You may have to fill out countless forms. The forms may differ depending on what you are attempting to change. Have the information you will need on hand to fill out the forms, such as phone numbers, names of physicians, addresses, and identification numbers. Have one book where you keep track of the people and programs you have contacted, along with their phone numbers and responses.

## **Work with Others**

Ask for help when you need it. Depending on your goal and the extent of your disability you may not need help at all. On the other hand, you may require ongoing or extensive assistance from family, friends, allies, and advocates.

**Review:**

- Know your rights.
- Compile the facts.
- Respect your limits.
- Take care of yourself.
- Know your goals.
- Obtain and give consent as required.
- Be organized.
- Work with others.

## CHAPTER 3

# The Legal System

Because people have legal rights that can be infringed upon, they may find themselves within the legal system. The legal system is a complicated environment for many reasons. Legal language is difficult to understand. It is full of procedures and rules that must be followed. It can be frustrating not knowing what the rules are. Try not to become overwhelmed and intimidated. When you are advocating on your own behalf or on behalf of others to protect or uphold rights, you are using the justice system for the purpose it was intended.

### **As a person with MS, you may be involved in the legal system:**

- When your employer or others discriminate against you on the basis of your disability
- When you are appealing the rejection of your application for Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPP-D) benefits
- When you have been denied disability insurance

### **Communicating with Lawyers**

You may want to meet several lawyers before hiring one. Interview the lawyer to determine whether they are appropriate for your case. Word of mouth and referrals from friends or family often can lead you to a suitable lawyer. You should hire a lawyer who makes you feel comfortable, who understands your particular legal issue, and who has an understanding of disability.

## **How much will legal help cost?**

Lawyers have different ways of setting fees. A lawyer may:

- Charge a fixed fee
- Charge a fee according to the amount of money or the value of property involved in your case
- Charge according to the amount of time spent on your case, according to what type of work it is, or according to how complex the work required is
- Charge various hourly rates
- Charge on a contingency basis (their fee is based on a percentage of the amount you receive if you win your case)
- Some lawyers do **pro bono** work, which means they will provide their services for free. This is at the discretion of the lawyer and their firm.

Costs for legal help depend on the nature and complexity of the issue.

## **What will happen when I first see a lawyer?**

When you see a lawyer for the first time you should:

- Bring any papers or documents that have anything to do with your case.
- Be prepared for many questions that help the lawyer to know the details of your case.
- Be completely honest.
- Know what you want to achieve so that the lawyer knows exactly how to direct his/her work.

- Ask any questions you may have about cost, timelines, and likelihood of success.
- Write down the answers to questions you have asked.
- Discuss the next steps if you have decided to hire this lawyer.
- Consider asking a family member or friend to accompany you to assist with taking notes and clarifying information.

### **What should I expect from my lawyer?**

- Comprehension of your legal issue
- Respect and patience
- To be told what your rights are
- To be told what you can expect from him/her and the process you are involved in
- An outline of the steps involved
- An estimate of anticipated costs and timeframes

It is impossible for a lawyer to predict exactly what will happen in the future, but he/she should be able to give you an idea of what to expect.

### **What should my lawyer expect from me?**

- Your cooperation
- Your complete honesty
- Your healthy boundaries: that is, your understanding that he/she is there to assist only with your legal case, not other important issues in your life

## **How do I find a lawyer?**

You can find a lawyer by contacting one of the following:

### **British Columbia**

#### **Lawyer Referral System, Canadian Bar Association, BC Branch**

Phone ..... 604-687-3221

Toll free..... 1-800-663-1919

Email ..... lawyerreferral@bccba.org

Web ..... [www.cba.org/bc/initiatives/main/lawyer\\_referral.aspx](http://www.cba.org/bc/initiatives/main/lawyer_referral.aspx)

The association provides an appropriate lawyer based on the area of law involved and the lawyer will provide an initial consultation for a fee of \$25.

#### **LawLINE, Legal Services Society**

Phone ..... 604-408-2172

Toll Free ..... 1-866-577-2525

Follow the voicemail prompts to be transferred to the LawLINE.

### **Yukon**

#### **Lawyer Referral Service, Law Society of Yukon**

Phone ..... 867-668-4231

Web ..... [www.lawsocietyyukon.com](http://www.lawsocietyyukon.com)

Provides a list of lawyers and a referral certificate to be presented to the lawyer. The certificate entitles you to an initial consultation with a lawyer for a \$30 fee.

## CHAPTER 4

# Advocacy in Government Programs

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### General Information

When you require income support, benefits, credits, services, or any other form of assistance through a government program, you will have to fulfill different eligibility requirements. Within each government program different criteria will apply.

What is considered a disability in one program may not be considered a disability in another. **Be sure you know the policies, eligibility criteria, and appeal processes for any government program before you proceed with complaints or appeals.** This applies equally to the following programs and agencies:

- Canada Pension Plan Disability benefits
- BC Employment and Assistance benefits
- WorkSafeBC or Yukon Workers' Compensation Health & Safety Board
- Insurance Corporation of BC
- Income tax
- Homeowner grants
- PharmaCare
- Housing programs
- Transportation programs

## Example of a Provincial Program

There are many government programs that offer different forms of assistance. One example is income assistance obtained through the BC Ministry of Housing and Social Development.

For people with disabilities in BC, there are two kinds of provincial disability benefits, falling under different provincial acts; 1) **Persons with Persistent Multiple Barriers (PPMB)** and 2) **Persons with Disabilities (PWD)**. If your family income is very low, you may qualify for support through one of these programs.

### Steps to Securing Support:

#### 1. Understand the eligibility criteria.

These two programs are aimed at different client populations and hence have different eligibility criteria such as:

- Different severity and duration of disability or impairment
- Different severity of the impact of impairments on daily activities and the ability to work

#### 2. Understand the application process.

Each program requires the completion of specific forms and procedures for applicants to be considered.

#### 3. Apply for the appropriate benefit.

4. Inform yourself about the details of the program you qualify for to ensure that you receive maximum benefits.

Each program comes with specific rules and additional benefits you may be eligible for. Examples include:

- Permission to earn additional income
- Reporting requirements
- Additional supplements (transportation allowance, dietary supplement, etc.)

### **5. Inform yourself about the hierarchy and structure of the agency you are dealing with.**

Different staff perform different duties and have different levels of responsibility. Enquire about possible accommodations for your disability such as having a designated case worker.



**Example:** When contacting the Ministry of Housing and Social Development you would first talk to an Employment and Assistance Worker (EAW), then a District Supervisor, then an Area Manager, then a Regional Director.

### **6. Stand up for your rights.**

You must follow the appeal process of the program or agency you are appealing to. This is usually outlined in legislation and regulations.

Seek support from community and advocacy agencies such as the BC Coalition of People with Disabilities, or local agencies, or the MS Society's Volunteer Legal Advocacy Program to assist you with:

- Researching your rights
- Compiling relevant information and documents

- Writing letters of support
- Attending advocacy and mediation meetings as appropriate

## **Finding More Information**

### **Official Government Websites**

Government websites can be complex and sometimes difficult to navigate. You can maintain organization by bookmarking and clearly naming individual pages on the site or by printing relevant information.

### **Information Line**

Some government programs provide information lines that you can call to listen to recorded information or speak with a representative.

### **Community and Advocacy Groups**

There are many different groups and organizations throughout British Columbia and the Yukon Territory. Please refer to Chapter 7 (page 35) or the VLAP booklet *Community and Legal Resources* for agencies in your community.



**Example:** The Advocacy Access Program of the BC Coalition of People with Disabilities has developed an excellent set of information sheets for PPMB and PWD applications that can be obtained through their website or by contacting the organization directly.

Phone . . . . . 604-872-1278

Toll Free. . . . . 1-800-663-1278

Website. . . . . [www.bccpd.bc.ca/s/AdvocacyAccess.asp](http://www.bccpd.bc.ca/s/AdvocacyAccess.asp)

## CHAPTER 5

# Advocacy in the Medical System

Advocating for yourself within the medical system means being aware of how the system works, how it is structured, and knowing some of the problems you may encounter. Some of those problems include waiting lists, referral rules, and changes to the healthcare system. It is important to develop a well-functioning healthcare team to address all aspects of your health.

### **The Healthcare Team**

People living with multiple sclerosis often develop a healthcare team consisting of any combination of the following healthcare professionals and organizations:

1. General Practitioners (GP) = Family Doctor
2. Neurologist (either in the community or at a specialized MS Clinic or outreach clinic of an MS Clinic)
3. Allied health professionals such as nurses, physiotherapists, massage therapists, occupational therapists, dietitians, counselors, or psychologists
4. Other specialists such as urologists, pain specialists, etc.

All healthcare professionals on your team may be able to support you in specific advocacy situations. The nature of the problem and your relationship with individual healthcare professionals will determine who is the most suitable person to write a letter on your behalf or to complete a form.

Most government programs require forms that need to be completed by a physician. However, some forms can also be

completed by professionals such as nurses, physiotherapists, or psychologists (i.e., part 3 of the PWD application; disability tax credit)

Choosing between your neurologist and your GP to complete a form or write a letter will depend on several factors such as:

- How well do they know you and the impact of your symptoms on your life?
- How knowledgeable are they about MS and its impact on a person's life and functioning in general, progression of the disease, and other relevant information?
- How long have they known you? Have they been able to follow your progression and life with MS long enough to be able to speak about changes observed in your functioning?
- Who do you trust most to represent your case?
- Can you get the necessary appointments within the required timeframe?

The opinion of neurologists is often considered more valuable due to their specialization. However, if you only saw your neurologist twice in the last several years but have had a good relationship with your GP and feel supported in your claim by your GP, this may be the better option.

## **General Practitioners**

Consistent healthcare is crucial when you live with a chronic disease such as MS. A trusting relationship based on good communication between you and your doctor increases your chances of consistent monitoring and treatment.

Your family doctor is a general practitioner. Your GP should be a key partner in managing your health because he/she:

- Looks after your general medical problems and is concerned with your overall health
- Provides referrals to specialists such as a MS Clinic neurologist or other healthcare providers

Some indications that you have a supportive relationship with your doctor are that she/he:

- Gives you the time you need to discuss medical conditions without hurrying you
- Treats you as a unique individual, seeing you as more than your illness
- Respects the medical choices you make

If you change doctors, make sure your medical history is forwarded to the new doctor.

If you do not have a family doctor, you can find out which GPs in your area are taking new patients by contacting the appropriate medical body in your province/territory. Ideally, look for someone who is familiar with the symptoms, diagnoses, and treatment of MS. You may have to interview the doctor to learn this.

To obtain a list of physicians in your area who are taking new patients contact:

**College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia**

Phone ..... 604-733-7758

Toll free..... 1-800-461-3008

Website..... [www.cpsbc.ca](http://www.cpsbc.ca)

## **Yukon Medical Council**

Phone . . . . . 867-667-3774

Website . . . . . [www.yukonmedicalcouncil.ca](http://www.yukonmedicalcouncil.ca)

Local MS Society Self-Help Groups may also be able to provide you with names of doctors in your area who treat people with MS. The BC & Yukon Division of the MS Society can help you find contact names for Self-Help Groups in your area.

## **Specialists**

Specialists are experts in specific fields of medicine. For example, a neurologist has specialized medical knowledge concerning the nervous system. A urologist has specialized knowledge of the urinary tract. You need a referral from your family doctor to see a specialist. However, if the specialist books a second appointment with you, you do not need another referral.

The role of the specialist is to treat a specific aspect of your illness. In addition, some medications can only be prescribed by a specialist. For example, in British Columbia, your neurologist can discuss the special drug therapies that are thought to alter the course of MS, as only neurologists can prescribe those medications.

The neurologist does not become your family doctor. You will continue to see your family doctor for general health concerns.

Your specialist may be able to provide more focused information for your application for disability related

supports, services ,or benefits, than your GP. Consider asking him/her to write letters or complete forms to support these claims.

Two problems with seeing specialists are that it will take a long time to get an appointment and you may have to tell your “whole story” all over again. Even when the specialist has your file, he/she does not know you and the details of your illness and symptoms. It is very important that your specialist understands how your disability affects your life.

## **Appointments with Doctors**

### **What should I do when I want to see a general practitioner or a specialist?**

- Make an appointment as soon as you realize you need to. You do not need appointments at walk-in clinics.
- Schedule your appointment to allow for the waiting time that may be necessary to see the doctor.
- Tell the receptionist if you would like to spend more time with the doctor than is usually scheduled.
- Let the receptionist know if you would like the doctor to see you along with a family member or friend so that time requirements can be adjusted.

### **What should I do before the visit to conserve energy?**

- Call to see if the doctor is on time with his/her appointments.
- Give yourself adequate time to get there.
- If you are delayed or need to cancel, call the doctor’s office 24 hours in advance of your appointment.

- Ask someone to go with you if you need assistance or support.
- Write down specific points or questions that you want to discuss.



If you are seeing your doctor to discuss an application for provincial/territorial or federal disability benefits or disability insurance, it's a good idea to let him/her see you in your "average to worst" condition because it will be a more accurate reflection of how MS affects you. For example, if fatigue is a problem for you especially in the afternoons, make an appointment to see your doctor in the afternoon, not in the morning when you are more alert and coping well.

### **What questions should I ask my doctor?**

If you get nervous when you see a doctor or if your memory and concentration have been affected by MS, it may be difficult for you to remember what you want to ask your doctor. The following are some questions that may help you.

- What is my specific condition?
- Why do I need a test or to see another doctor or healthcare professional?
- What are my treatment options?
- How might the treatment affect me?
- What will happen once I begin treatment?
- How will we follow up?

- What should I do if my condition worsens between now and the next time I see you?
- Who should I call if there are treatment complications?
- Where can I get more information?

### **What should I do during the visit?**

- Ask the receptionist if the appointment will be delayed. If you are unable to wait, reschedule the appointment.
- Inform the receptionist about any changes to your personal information such as address, phone number, next of kin, and marital status.
- At the beginning of the appointment, summarize your health concerns.
- Tell the doctor about all the medications you take, including vitamins and non-prescription medications.
- Describe your symptoms to your doctor, tell him/her about all of the healthcare practitioners you've seen and any treatment or tests you've taken.
- Listen to the information your doctor gives you and write it down.
- If you are feeling rushed, uncomfortable, or if you don't know or understand something, be assertive. Ask your doctor to explain it again. Consider repeating in your own words what the doctor said just to make sure you understood.
- Ask for information sheets that you can take home.
- If you don't think you can follow your doctor's advice, you should state this and explain why. Your reasons may be due to personal beliefs, fear, preferences, or lack of money.

- If you are uncomfortable making decisions about treatment, ask for more information or discuss the benefits of a second opinion.
- Before you leave the doctor's office, be clear about instructions pertaining to test results, recommended follow-up, and contact people.

### **What should I do after a visit?**

- Make follow-up appointments right away and book any required medical tests.
- Fill any prescriptions given to you. Remember to ask the pharmacist for any information on contraindications and side effects of the medication.
- If you feel your doctor acted inappropriately, talk to someone you trust about it before you decide to make an official complaint. If you do want to make an official complaint, contact the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia at 604-733-7758 or 1-800-461-3008 or the Yukon Medical Council at 867-667-3774.

## **Coordination and Consistency of Information**

### **Keep Your Doctors Informed**

To help yourself, your doctors, and the processes involved in receiving provincial/territorial benefits or services, medical or otherwise, make sure that all of your doctors know what other medical professionals are doing for you.

## **Be Thorough and Consistent**

Make sure your doctors are **thorough and consistent** in the information they provide about your disability on forms, in letters, and on other documents in support of applications you are making.

## **Describe Your Symptoms and Limitations**

For application purposes, make sure your doctors know the details of how MS symptoms have affected your daily living activities, work, and quality of life. Guide your doctors when they are filling out information on forms.



If you have not conveyed the functional limitations of your particular symptoms to your doctor, he/she cannot provide the medical support required for successful applications.

## **Important Tips**

- Keep all of your medical information and application forms organized.
- Answer all questions on the forms.
- Keep copies of all the information you submit.
- Write down information given to you by phone or in person.
- Make notes of the dates you speak to people, their names, addresses, and positions.
- Make note of the date when you submit various applications.

- Keep track of telephone calls or correspondence regarding those applications.
- Be familiar with the timeframes involved in various application procedures.
- Look over your application one final time before submitting it. Make sure you have answered all the questions and that all the required documentation is attached. If you do not fully complete the application, your application process may be delayed.
- If you need help completing an application, ask for assistance from a friend, family member, or advocate. If you have assistance, be sure to mention this in your application.

## CHAPTER 6

# Advocacy in the Political System

Before you contact a politician to assist you with resolving your case, make sure you understand the policies and eligibility criteria of the program you are unhappy with and the appeal process for that program.

- Read information about the program and appeal process.
- Ask friends, relatives, or advocates to assist you. Sometimes it is valuable to have a “witness” with you for moral support or as a back-up informant.
- Talk to the relevant organization or agency representatives about your concerns.



**Example:** If you want to complain about your provincial disability benefits or the way you were treated in relation to applying for them, first speak with your Employment and Assistance Worker (EAW) at the BC Ministry of Housing and Social Development. If that does not result in the desired change, contact their District Supervisor. If you need moral support because you are afraid you won't remember what was said or what you want to say, or if you want a witness to the conversation or interaction, take a friend, relative, or advocate. Follow any guidelines that their appeal process stipulates.

Once these steps have been followed, if you have not achieved the results you desire, and you are certain that you have a case, contact your Ombudsman, Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), or Member of Parliament (MP).

## **MLAs and MPs**

### **What is an MLA?**

MLAs are provincial/territorial government representatives elected to serve their constituents, that is, the people in their specific ridings. Those who become cabinet ministers or who sit on committees take on additional duties, but they do not give up their primary responsibilities to represent those who elected them.

### **How do I contact my MLA?**

You are not limited to contacting the MLA for your constituency. You can contact the cabinet minister responsible for a specific department, although it will be more difficult to meet with him/her. You can also contact MLAs from an opposition party, but their ability to help you may be limited.

### **British Columbia**

Find out who your local BC MLA is by visiting [www.leg.bc.ca/mla](http://www.leg.bc.ca/mla), looking in the Government of BC pages of your local phone book, or call 604-660-2421 in the Lower Mainland, 250-387-6121 in Victoria, or 1-800-663-7867.

### **Yukon**

Find out who your local Yukon MLA is by visiting [www.legassembly.gov.yk.ca/mlas/members.html](http://www.legassembly.gov.yk.ca/mlas/members.html), or call 867-393-5800.

### **What is an MP?**

MPs are federal government representatives and deal with issues that the federal government has control over (such as income tax, Canada Pension Plan, etc.).

## **How do I contact my MP?**

Find out who your local MP is by visiting [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca), looking in the Government of Canada pages of your local phone book, or calling 1-800-622-6232. You will be asked for your postal code, so have it handy.

## **When writing to your MLA or MP:**

- Point out that you have gone through all the appropriate channels already.
- Request a meeting so that you can discuss your concerns.
- Keep the letter to one or two pages long.
- Use the correct title when addressing the politician. For example, "Dear Honorable James Smith."

Consult the following sites for MLA and MP titles:

BC MLAs: [www.leg.bc.ca/mla/3-1-5.htm](http://www.leg.bc.ca/mla/3-1-5.htm)

Yukon MLAs: [www.legassembly.gov.yk.ca/contact.html](http://www.legassembly.gov.yk.ca/contact.html)

Federal MPs: [webinfo.parl.gc.ca/MembersOfParliament/MainMPsCompleteList.aspx?TimePeriod=Current&Language=E](http://webinfo.parl.gc.ca/MembersOfParliament/MainMPsCompleteList.aspx?TimePeriod=Current&Language=E)

- If you required assistance to write the letter, state this fact and the name of the person who helped you.
- Ask the politician for a reply to your letter.
- Keep copies of the letter for yourself.
- If you don't receive a reply within three weeks, call or write again.
- Send copies of the letter to all parties involved and relevant community organizations.

## **How should I prepare for a meeting with my MLA or MP?**

- Consider meeting as a group. Collective voices of many people who share the same problem have a greater effect.
- Take relevant correspondence, reports, and articles.
- Take an ally or witness with you for moral support or to take notes.
- Do not assume that the politician will have any knowledge about your situation or about MS in general.
- Explain how the situation is impacting you and others.
- Do not get angry with the politician; try to remain calm.
- Do not make accusations that can not be supported by facts.
- If you know precisely what action you want from the politician, ask for it.
- If you do not know what you want but you know you need support, ask the politician how he/she can help you.
- Try not to go over the appointment time.

## **What should I do after the meeting with my MLA or MP?**

- Review your notes of the meeting.
- Follow up on steps you should be taking that were raised during the meeting.
- Send a letter to the MLA or MP thanking them for their assistance and summarizing the main points of the meeting and the consequent commitments or actions.

# The Ombudsman

## What is the Ombudsman?

The Ombudsman conducts impartial investigations of written complaints by people who believe they have been treated unfairly by public agencies. This office is independent of government. It has broad powers to investigate the actions, decisions, practices, and procedures of government departments, boards, agencies, and commissions. The investigation is provided at no cost to you.

## When should I contact the Ombudsman?

Appealing to the office of the Ombudsman is a last resort. It means you have exhausted all other informal and formal appeals. This does not include contacting your MLA or MP, which you can do at the same time.

### The Ombudsman can:

- Provide information about the steps to take in dealing with a public agency
- Try to settle complaints through consultation
- Investigate complaints about administrative unfairness by a public agency
- Make recommendations to a public agency to resolve unfairness
- Report to the provincial legislature
- Issue public reports

### The Ombudsman can investigate:

- Provincial government ministries
- Crown corporations such as ICBC and BC Hydro

- Government boards such as WorkSafeBC and the BC Human Rights Tribunal
- Hospitals, regional and local health agencies, and health-related government agencies such as PharmaCare and the Medical Services Plan
- Schools and school districts
- Universities and colleges
- Municipal and regional governments\*
- Self-regulating professions such as The College of Physicians and Surgeons and The Law Society\*

*\*As of January 2003, the BC Ombudsman will record but not investigate complaints regarding municipal and regional governments and self-regulating professional and occupational associations, other than in exceptional circumstances.*

*In the Yukon, the Ombudsman cannot investigate complaints regarding municipalities and Yukon First Nations governments unless the complaint was initiated by the government itself.*

### **The Ombudsman cannot investigate:**

- Federal government departments, agencies, and programs
- Private corporations, including insurance agencies and banks
- Courts
- Police/RCMP
- Doctors

## **Complaints**

Complaints may be about the unfair administrative decisions of a public agency, including complaints about delay, rudeness, negligence, arbitrariness, oppressive behavior, or unlawfulness.

The Ombudsman may investigate complaints from individuals or groups of people and has discretion to decide which complaints are investigated and which are not.

## **How do I contact the Ombudsman?**

### **British Columbia**

- Call 1-800-567-3247.
- Consult [www.ombudsman.bc.ca](http://www.ombudsman.bc.ca). You can download a complaint form and mail it, or you can fill out an online complaint form directly on the web page. Information available in English, French, Chinese, Punjabi, Spanish and Vietnamese.

### **Yukon**

- Call 1-800-661-0408.
- Consult [www.ombudsman.yk.ca](http://www.ombudsman.yk.ca). You can download a complaint form and mail it to the Ombudsman's office.

## CHAPTER 7

# Government and Community Organizations Directory

### British Columbia

#### **BC Coalition of People with Disabilities, Advocacy Access Program**

204 – 456 West Broadway

Vancouver, BC V5Y 1R3

Telephone ..... 604-872-1278

Toll Free ..... 1-800-663-1278

TTY..... 604-875-8835

Email ..... [advocacy@bccpd.bc.ca](mailto:advocacy@bccpd.bc.ca)

Web ..... [www.bccpd.bc.ca/s/AdvocacyAccess.asp](http://www.bccpd.bc.ca/s/AdvocacyAccess.asp)

#### **Community Legal Assistance Society (CLAS)**

Suite 300 – 1140 West Pender Street

Vancouver, BC V6E 4G1

Telephone ..... 604-685-3425

Toll Free ..... 1-888-685-6222

Web ..... [www.clasbc.net](http://www.clasbc.net)

#### **Dial-A-Law, Canadian Bar Association, BC Branch**

Also available in Chinese and Punjabi (Punjabi – website only)

Telephone ..... 604-687-4680

Toll Free ..... 1-800-565-5297

Web ..... [www.dialalaw.org](http://www.dialalaw.org)

#### **Enquiry BC**

Telephone ..... 604-660-2421 (Vancouver)

..... 250-387-6121 (Victoria)

Toll Free ..... 1-800-663-7867

TDD ..... 604-775-0303 (Vancouver)  
TDD Toll Free.... 1-800-661-8773  
Email ..... EnquiryBC@gov.bc.ca  
Web ..... [www.mser.gov.bc.ca/prgs/enquiry\\_bc.htm](http://www.mser.gov.bc.ca/prgs/enquiry_bc.htm)

**LawLINE, Legal Services Society**

Telephone ..... 604-408-2172  
Toll Free ..... 1-866-577-2525  
Web ..... [www.lss.bc.ca/general/LawLINE.asp](http://www.lss.bc.ca/general/LawLINE.asp)

**Lawyer Referral Service, Canadian Bar Association,  
BC Branch**

Telephone ..... 604-687-3221  
Toll Free ..... 1-800-663-1919  
Web ..... [www.cba.org/BC/Initiatives/main/lawyer\\_referral.aspx](http://www.cba.org/BC/Initiatives/main/lawyer_referral.aspx)

**Legal Services Society**

400 – 510 Burrard Street  
Vancouver, BC V6C 3A8  
For Legal Aid:  
Call Centre ..... 604-408-2172  
Toll Free: ..... 1-866-577-2525  
TTY..... 604-601-6236  
TTY Toll Free .... 1-877-991-2299  
Web ..... [www.lss.bc.ca](http://www.lss.bc.ca)

**Office of the Ombudsman**

P.O. Box 9039 STN PROV GOVT  
Victoria, BC V8W 9A5  
Toll Free ..... 1-800-567-3247  
Web ..... [www.ombudsman.bc.ca](http://www.ombudsman.bc.ca)

**PovNet**

Telephone ..... 604-876-8638  
Email ..... info@povnet.org  
Web ..... www.povnet.org

**Pro Bono Law of BC**

P.O. Box 103  
845 Cambie Street  
Vancouver, BC V6B 4Z9  
Telephone ..... 604-893-8932  
Email ..... info@probononet.bc.ca  
Web ..... probononet.bc.ca

**The Salvation Army's Pro Bono Lawyer  
Consultation Program**

555 Homer Street  
Vancouver, BC V6B 1K8  
Telephone ..... 604-694-6647  
Email ..... contact@probono.ca  
Web ..... www.probono.ca

**The Western Canada Society to Access Justice**

1440 West 12th Avenue  
Vancouver, BC. V6H 1M8  
Telephone ..... 604-482-3195  
Clinic Line ..... 604-878-7400  
Toll Free ..... 1-877-762-6664 (Appointment Line)  
Email ..... help@accessjustice.ca  
Web ..... www.accessjustice.ca

## **Yukon**

### **Inquiry Centre**

Telephone ..... 867-667-5811  
Toll Free ..... 1-800-661-0408  
TTY..... 1-867-393-7460  
Web ..... [www.gov.yk.ca/services](http://www.gov.yk.ca/services)

### **Law Line, Yukon Public Legal Education Association**

Telephone ..... 867-668-5297  
Toll Free ..... 1-866-667-4305

### **Law Society of Yukon**

Phone ..... 867-668-4231  
Email ..... [info@lawsocietyyukon.com](mailto:info@lawsocietyyukon.com)  
Web ..... [www.lawsocietyyukon.com](http://www.lawsocietyyukon.com)

### **Lawyer Referral Service, Law Society of Yukon**

Phone ..... 867-668-4231  
Web ..... [www.lawsocietyyukon.com](http://www.lawsocietyyukon.com)

### **The Ombudsman**

P.O. Box 31300  
Whitehorse, YT Y1A 5P7  
Phone ..... 867-667-8468  
Toll Free ..... 1-800-661-0408  
Web ..... [www.ombudsman.yk.ca](http://www.ombudsman.yk.ca)

### **Yukon Legal Services Society (YLSS)**

Suite 203 – 2131 Second Avenue  
Whitehorse, YT Y1A 1C3  
Telephone ..... 867-667-5210  
Toll Free ..... 1-800-661-0408 ext. 5210

Email ..... [administration@legalaid.yk.ca](mailto:administration@legalaid.yk.ca)  
Web ..... [www.legalaid.yk.ca](http://www.legalaid.yk.ca)

**Yukon Public Legal Education Association**

Phone ..... 867-668-5297  
Toll Free ..... 866-667-4305  
Email ..... [yplea@yukoncollege.yk.ca](mailto:yplea@yukoncollege.yk.ca)  
Web ..... [www.yplea.com](http://www.yplea.com)

## CHAPTER 8

# MS Society of Canada Directory

### **BC & Yukon Division**

1501 – 4330 Kingsway  
Burnaby, BC V5H 4G7  
Telephone ..... 604-689-3144  
Toll Free ..... 1-800-268-7582  
Email ..... info.bc@mssociety.ca  
Web ..... www.mssociety.ca/bc

### **National Office**

700 – 175 Bloor Street East  
Toronto, ON M4W 3R8  
Telephone ..... 416-922-6065  
Toll Free ..... 1-800-361-2985  
Email ..... info@mssociety.ca  
Web ..... www.mssociety.ca

### **Chapter Offices**

Please contact your nearest Chapter for their location and address.

### **Central Island Chapter**

Telephone ..... 250-754-6321  
Toll Free ..... 1-888-844-2047  
Email ..... info.centralisland@mssociety.ca  
Web ..... www.mssociety.ca/chapters/centralisland

### **Fraser Valley Chapter**

Telephone ..... 604-393-7122  
Toll Free ..... 1-877-303-7122

Email ..... [info.fraservalley@mssociety.ca](mailto:info.fraservalley@mssociety.ca)  
Web ..... [www.mssociety.ca/fraservalley](http://www.mssociety.ca/fraservalley)

### **Kamloops & Area Chapter**

Telephone ..... 250-314-0773  
Toll Free ..... 1-888-304-6622  
Email ..... [info.kamloops@mssociety.ca](mailto:info.kamloops@mssociety.ca)  
Web ..... [www.mssociety.ca/chapters/kamloops](http://www.mssociety.ca/chapters/kamloops)

### **Lower Mainland Chapter**

Telephone ..... 604-689-3144  
Toll Free ..... 1-800-268-7582  
Email ..... [info.bc@mssociety.ca](mailto:info.bc@mssociety.ca)  
Web ..... [www.mssociety.ca/bc](http://www.mssociety.ca/bc)

### **North Vancouver Island Chapter**

Telephone ..... 250-286-0999  
Toll Free ..... 1-888-299-2025  
Email ..... [judy.spencer@mssociety.ca](mailto:judy.spencer@mssociety.ca)  
Web ..... [www.mssociety.ca/chapters/northvanisl](http://www.mssociety.ca/chapters/northvanisl)

### **Okanagan Chapter**

Telephone ..... 250-762-5850  
Email ..... [info.okanagan@mssociety.ca](mailto:info.okanagan@mssociety.ca)  
Web ..... [www.mssociety.ca/chapters/kelowna](http://www.mssociety.ca/chapters/kelowna)

### **Prince George Chapter**

Telephone ..... 250-564-7074  
Email ..... [info.princegeorge@mssociety.ca](mailto:info.princegeorge@mssociety.ca)  
Web ..... [www.mssociety.ca/chapters/princegeorge](http://www.mssociety.ca/chapters/princegeorge)

### **South Okanagan and Similkameen Chapter**

Telephone ..... 250-493-6564

Email ..... info.penticton@mssociety.ca

Web ..... [www.mssociety.ca/chapters/sos](http://www.mssociety.ca/chapters/sos)

### **South Vancouver Island Chapter**

#### **Victoria**

Telephone ..... 250-388-6496

Email ..... info.victoria@mssociety.ca

Web ..... [www.mssociety.ca/chapters/svic](http://www.mssociety.ca/chapters/svic)

### **Cowichan Valley**

Telephone ..... 250-748-7010

Email ..... anne.muir@mssociety.ca

Web ..... [www.mssociety.ca/chapters/cowichan](http://www.mssociety.ca/chapters/cowichan)

### **West Kootenay Region**

Telephone ..... 250-229-4994

Toll Free ..... 1-866-352-3997

Email ..... lonnie.facchina@mssociety.ca

Web ..... [www.mssociety.ca/chapters/westkootenay](http://www.mssociety.ca/chapters/westkootenay)

# Notes

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# Notes

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Revised January 2009

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada's Volunteer Legal Advocacy Program provides a range of legal and advocacy support to people living with MS throughout British Columbia and the Yukon by utilizing volunteers who have legal expertise and/or advocacy experience.

