

January 13, 2003

The Honourable Anne McLellan
Minister of Health
Minister's Office – Health Canada
Brooke Claxton Building, Tunney's Pasture
P.L. 0906C
Ottawa ON K1A 0K9

Dear Minister McLellan:

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada has been an active participant in the two recent reviews of health care in Canada headed by the Honourable Roy Romanow and Senator Michael Kirby. As the only national voluntary organization in Canada that supports multiple sclerosis (MS) research and services for the 50,000 people with MS and their families, the Society has a unique perspective on the challenges faced by people with this disease. As you know, MS is a chronic disease of the central nervous system that unfortunately often leads to severe disability.

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada hopes that in your discussions with your provincial and territorial counterparts, you will keep in mind the needs of people with MS and others with chronic diseases and disabilities. In particular,

1. Access to diagnostic technology, especially MRI scanners, is a priority need for people with MS, since early diagnosis and treatment are vital for people with MS. We urge that you support measures to ensure timely access;
2. Home care is a particular need for people with chronic, long-term illnesses like MS. Both the Senate Report and the Report by Mr. Romanow recommended expanded programs for post-acute and palliative care. Mr. Romanow noted that any additional funding could allow the provinces and territories to expand their support of home care for people with chronic conditions. We urge you to support home care in these areas;

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3. Drugs to treat MS are very expensive and provincial and territorial drug programs provide uneven access and compensation. Mr. Romanow and Kirby have suggested that the federal government provide additional funding under a program to offset the sometimes catastrophic costs. We urge that you support this and other initiatives that will assist people to afford expensive but necessary drugs that will extend their lives or improve their quality of life; and
4. Family members, often at great hardship, provide significant support for people with MS and other chronic diseases and disabilities. We urge that you support financial assistance for caregivers who work tirelessly on behalf of their loved ones.

We hope that your discussions with the provincial and territorial Ministers of Health will be fruitful. If the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada can be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to call upon us. You may contact: Deanna Groetzinger, Vice-President, Communications, Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada, at 416 967-3007 or Deanna.Groetzinger@mssociety.ca

Yours sincerely

(Original Signed)

Louis P. Desmarais
National Chair
Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada

Cc Alistair M. Fraser, President and CEO
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Deanna Groetzinger, Vice-President, Communications
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