

Moving policy to action

MS Society petitions Parliament for change

FROM VERNON, B.C., to Trois-Rivières, Que., and from Burlington, Ont., to Moncton, N.B., nearly 3,000 Canadians joined the MS Society's petition campaign for better income programs for people affected by MS. Across Canada, MS Society members and friends signed petitions that will be delivered directly to Parliament this spring.

"Thanks for taking the initiative with the petition. Everyone we approached was more than eager to sign," wrote a Brampton, Ont., couple when mailing a petition with 25 signatures back to the MS Society.

The petition asks the federal government to make modest changes to current programs that will have significant benefits for people affected by MS:

Make employment insurance sickness benefits more flexible to allow people with MS and other episodic diseases to work part-time and receive partial benefits so they may work whenever possible without losing access to income support when ill and unemployed. This change would encourage an ongoing attachment to the workforce, which is vital in preventing future unemployment.

Make the disability tax credit a refundable benefit, which will assist people who are in the workforce, but will have the greatest impact on those who have the least – people who have no income against which they can apply the credit.

Allow spouses to claim the caregiver tax credit. Right now, most relatives other than spouses can receive this amount, but spouses are the ones who generally provide care day after day and week after week.

Why income security?

In February 2008, the Multiple Sclerosis Society released four policy papers to con-

vince governments that the transformations it calls for are practical, economical and, above all, just. The papers focus on the following issues: income security and supports; caregiver supports, access to drug therapies; and access to home care and age-appropriate long-term care.

"In just a few months, we have been able to gather almost 3,000 signatures. This shows that people are very much concerned about these issues and want to be involved."

- Lynn Hunter, Chair, National Government Relations Committee

Strategically, the committee agreed to focus on the issue of income security. Having an adequate income is vitally important to people living with intermittent, recurring disabilities like MS. An episodic disability keeps people from participating regularly in the workforce, but also from qualifying for federal disability benefits.

Because the average age of MS diagnosis is between 15 and 40, the illness has a profound impact on a person's ability to work. As the disease progresses, nearly 80 per cent of people with MS are unable to work full-time.

The MS Society took the advocacy campaign to Ottawa through meetings with then-Minister of Human Resources and Social Development Monte Solberg, Members of Parliament in all parties and government officials. This fall, the MS

Society launched the petition campaign, which asked members and friends across the country to sign the petition and to circulate it to their relatives and friends.

"We were met with immediate enthusiasm wherever and whenever we asked people to sign the petition," said Lynn Hunter, chair of the national government relations committee. "In just a few months, we have been able to gather almost 3,000 signatures. This shows that people are very much concerned about these issues and want to be involved."

The MS Society will present the petitions to the House of Commons this spring with the assistance of MPs who are championing the issues.

To learn more about MS Society proposals for income security, see *Multiple Sclerosis & Income Security: The need is now* at www.mssociety.ca. Click on *Advocacy*, then *Better income security*.

Join MS Society advocacy efforts

If you are interested in joining our advocacy initiatives, please contact the MS Society of Canada to sign up to receive news, updates and opportunities for action. You can help shape policies and programs that impact people affected by multiple sclerosis. Just send your name, mailing address and e-mail address to advocacy@mssociety.ca.

Multiple sclerosis is an often disabling disease of the brain and spinal cord. An estimated 55,000 to 75,000 Canadians have MS, making Canada one of the highest-risk countries for the disease. The MS Society of Canada funds both research to prevent, treat and cure MS and services for people affected by MS.