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VIA E-Mail and Chapter Mail

Distribution:

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Government Relations and Social Action E-Alert

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Federal Budget analysis

Budget 2009 has been billed as having “a little something for everyone”, but what does it deliver for Canadians affected by MS? Some initiatives of particular interest include:

Housing

- \$75 million over two years to build social housing for persons with disabilities, with \$200 million over two years to support social housing in the North. This money will be contingent upon matching support from provinces and municipalities.
- \$2 billion over two years in low-cost loans to municipalities to finance improvements to housing-related infrastructure.

Employment Insurance (EI) benefits

- \$500 million over two years in a **Strategic Training and Transition Fund** to support the particular needs of people who do not qualify for EI training, such as the self-employed or those who have been out of work for a prolonged period of time.

Tax Reduction

- Increasing the amount that low-and middle-income families can earn before their federal child benefits are phased out.

The government came up short on making eligibility for EI more flexible to allow people to work part-time and collect benefits, and we did not see the Caregiver Tax Credit eligibility extended to spouses, nor was the Disability Tax Credit made refundable, measures that the MS Society and thousands of Canadians called for.

The MS Society will present petitions containing the signatures of over 3,000 Canadians to the House of Commons this spring, calling on Parliament to implement the EI and tax relief measures that were not delivered in Budget 2009. If you have not already signed this petition, please contact Kim Steele at kim.steele@mssociety.ca.

Your opinion needed!

The MS Society – a member of Neurological Health Charities Canada (NHCC) – invites you to participate in an important survey.

In Canada, there is a lack of information about the extent and impact of neurological conditions. This makes it difficult to plan effective policy, programs and investments. NHCC is committed to working towards filling this gap in information, and is asking you to express your views on what type of information you feel would be important to collect.

NHCC is a collective of organizations that represent people with chronic, often progressive, brain and nervous system diseases, disorders and injuries in Canada. In conjunction with the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, NHCC is considering what information is needed about the frequency of occurrence and the impact of neurological conditions, including MS. To fill out this short survey please visit:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=FEO_2bes8Jm0Sys0JPC0zJNA_3d_3d

The survey will be on-line until February 27, 2009. Thank you for your participation!

In other survey-related news, Jerry Ford, a Cobourg resident and a strong advocate for people with disabilities, has launched a new website and is seeking input on Ontario's most welcoming towns. To provide input please visit http://www.ehwhat.ca/?page_id=25.

Ontario forges ahead with healthcare system transformation

The Government of Ontario has put more power into the hands of Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) and Community Care Access Centres (CCACs). In December, Ontario announced what the Ontario Home Care Association has billed as "broad reaching initiatives to improve home care". These measures include:

- Strengthened accountability through the introduction of province-wide quality measures and a public reporting system.
- Changes to the current CCAC competitive bidding process to ensure consistent, quality care for clients and to enhance transparency and fairness in the selection of service providers.
- Greater authority for CCACs to provide clients with care teams suited to their medical condition.
- Expanded role of CCACs to include placing clients in adult day programs and supportive housing, long-term care homes, in providing services such as diagnostic and respiratory therapy, and in offering nursing and other treatment services in group settings.

The MS Society has long advocated for improvements to home care, and many of these measures may bring welcomed, positive change. For more information, please see http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/media/news_releases/archives/nr_08/dec/nr_20081215_2.html.

MS Society seeks advisory committee members

The MS Society, Ontario Division is developing two new position papers and needs your help. The first paper will deal access to medical treatment and services in Northern communities, the second will deal with accessible transportation. The papers will be used to:

- Provide background information, research, and perspective.
- Provide recommendations to the Government of Ontario and potentially to municipalities, regional authorities, and other bodies.
- Provide MS Society volunteers and staff with tools to use in their advocacy efforts throughout the province.

The papers will be developed with the assistance of advisory committees. Members of the advisory committees will be invited to provide perspective on the issues, to provide feedback on public policy options, and to comment on drafts of the position papers.

If you are interested in joining an advisory committee, or if you'd like more information, please contact Kim Steele, Senior Coordinator, Government Relations, at kim.steele@mssociety.ca before **February 28, 2009**.

2009 Government Relations Workshop postponed

The 2009 Government Relations and Social Action Workshop, scheduled for April 4th and 5th, has been postponed until further notice. There may be some teleconference or web-based government relations training opportunities offered in the coming months, so please stay tuned for updates!

NEW FEATURE: The Reading Room

This new addition to the *Government Relations and Social Action E-Alert* will provide links to interesting articles and publications, from local to national news and happenings.

Accessible transportation

Proposed Transportation Standards open for public review:

<http://www.mcass.gov.on.ca/mcass/english/pillars/accessibilityOntario/accesson/business/transportation/>

Cobourg makes inroads for accessible transportation:

http://www.accessibilitynews.ca/acnews/press/mobility_articles.php?Mobility=274

MS Research

Genetic study shows direct link between vitamin D and MS susceptibility gene:

http://www.mssociety.ca/en/releases/nr_20090205.htm

<http://www.cbc.ca/cp/health/090205/x020515A.html>

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20090206.wlvitamin06/BNStory/specialScienceandHealth/home>

Want to know more about MS research? If so, please sign up for the MS Society's research updates by contacting Aprile Royal at aprile.royal@mssociety.ca.

If you have anything to contribute to The Reading Room, please send your suggestions to kim.steele@mssociety.ca.

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