

**Ontario Division**

175 Bloor Street East
Suite 700, North Tower
Toronto, Ontario M4W 3R8
Telephone: (416) 922-6065
Fax: (416) 922-7538
Toll Free: 1-800-268-7582
www.mssociety.ca

December 14, 2006

VIA E-Mail and Chapter Mail

Distribution:

Chapter/ Unit Chairs & Executive Directors
Social Action Directors, Chapters/ Units
Ontario Government and Community Social Action Committee (OSAC)
Ontario Executive Committee & Board
Government Relations & Social Action E-Network
Ontario Client Services and Chapter Operations Staff
Coordinators, MS Clinics, Ontario
(Please forward to other interested members)

Government Relations and Social Action E-Alert

- **Ontario Legislature Approves Changes to Human Rights (Bill 107)**
- **Update re Drug Program Changes (Bill 102)**
- **Trillium Drug Program**
- **Long Term Care Reform and Finding My Place**
- **MS Society Represented at End Exclusion Forum**
- **Government Relations/ Social Action Workshop**
- **National Government Relations Brief to Finance Committee**
- **Government Relations and Social Action E-Alerts Online**

Ontario Legislature Approves Changes to Human Rights (Bill 107)

On December 5, 2006 the Ontario Legislature approved Bill 107, the legislation that amends the human rights code. This controversial legislation brings about these four key changes: removes the Human Rights Commission's role in determining which complaints should go to a Human Rights Tribunal hearing; provides individuals with direct access in bringing forward complaints to the Human Rights Tribunal; establishes a Human Rights Legal Support Centre to assist people in making human rights complaints; and redefines the Human Rights Commission's role to investigate and pursue systemic human rights violations.

The MS Society was actively involved throughout the consultation process. In July, MS Society staff met with the Attorney General's office to provide detailed recommendations about how the legislation could be improved. In August, OSAC member Yassemin Cohanim presented our recommendations to the Ontario Legislative Standing Committee on Justice Policy. In November, after reviewing amendments to Bill 107 from the Attorney General, the MS Society again had the opportunity to appear before the Justice Policy Committee and provided a qualified endorsement of Bill 107 based on the proposed amendments. OSAC

member Cathy Topping and Deanna Groetzing, Vice-President, Government Relations and Policy, told the Justice Policy Committee the MS Society was pleased the amendments met most of the Society's previous recommendations.

Key among the amendments is the establishment in the legislation of a Human Rights Legal Support Centre. The centre is crucial in providing the necessary legal assistance to individuals with human rights complaints to move the complaint through the system. Other important amendments which led to the MS Society's qualified endorsement are the removal of user fees for complainants and the strengthening of the Human Rights Commission's investigative powers of systemic human rights issues.

The Justice Policy Committee also heard our concerns including the need for a mediation process to be included at the Tribunal level and the need for adequate funding of all parts of the human rights system, including the new Human Rights Legal Support Centre. We also told committee members that the MS Society was extremely disappointed in the government's decision to cut short the hearings and to move quickly to a vote on the bill since this action prevented many organizations and individuals from providing input about how the legislation could be improved. Unfortunately, the government moved ahead and the legislation was approved on December 5.

In January, the MS Society presentation to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy will be posted at www.mssociety.ca on the Ontario Division Government Relations/Social Action pages. Additional information will be provided as the changes to the Ontario human rights system are implemented.

Update re Drug Program Changes (Bill 102)

Bill 102, the legislation that made major changes to Ontario's drug programs, became law on October 1, 2006. However, many of the reforms have yet to be implemented. Brent Fraser, Director of the Drug System Secretariat, provided an overview of progress to date in late November at a stakeholder meeting and noted that many changes won't be in place until various times throughout 2007. For example, while the Section 8 process for accessing drugs that are not on the drug formulary (this includes all the MS disease-modifying therapies) will be replaced, that change-over to the new Conditional Listings category has yet to be completed. Mr. Fraser noted the Drug System Secretariat is negotiating "intensely" with all pharmaceutical companies that have Section 8 drugs. So, it is business as usual for the foreseeable future regarding the Section 8 process.

Mr. Fraser also highlighted the new rapid review process to speed up the availability in Ontario for new, truly innovative drugs. If implemented as promised, this could provide faster access to new MS therapies when they become available. Another change that should be helpful for people with MS is the move to align current public drug programs so that funding decisions are made without reference to how they are administered (e.g., oral tablets, injected medications or intravenous drugs).

The legislation is also providing for more public input into drug system decision making. A Pharmacy Council has been established, the Committee to Evaluate Drugs will have two "patient" members as will the cancer sub-committee. A Citizen's Council is also in the works. These latter changes will not take place until sometime in 2007.

The changes to Ontario's drug programs have been controversial. Some pharmacists were against the removal of the rebates they received from generic drug manufacturers and fear that the increased fees they will receive for dispensing and counselling services will not replace this lost income. The pharmaceutical industry has stated that the cost-containment measures in the legislation may curtail their ability to fund research and may lead to reduced investment in drug research and development in Ontario.

The MS Society will continue to be involved in this important issue and provide information as soon as it is available about how the changes might affect MS therapies.

Trillium Drug Program

Sharon Saunders, Manager, Client Services, participated in a focus group organized by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to provide feedback to improve the Trillium Drug Program application form and guide. Earlier this year, processing of applications and handling of inquiries was outsourced to a third party supplier, Resolve Corporation. The change has gone smoothly, according to ministry representatives. Currently 83,000 households in Ontario use the Trillium Drug Program to help pay for their drug costs. Reimbursement is based on family income as verified by the Canada Revenue Agency.

The Trillium Drug Program now has an automatic renewal process and strongly encourages applicants to use the electronic link to the Canada Revenue Agency to speed up both renewals and initial applications. However, applicants, if they wish, can continue to apply to the program using the printed forms. Application forms and guides are available at pharmacies and MPP offices.

Sharon will continue to be part of the Trillium Drug Program focus group to improve the application and the guide.

Long Term Care Reform and Finding My Place

In late November, John Clifford, Chair of the Ontario Government and Community Social Action Committee, Deanna Groetzinger and government relations consultant Chuck Rachlis continued the efforts to educate politicians and government officials about the needs of younger adults with MS who require age-appropriate long-term care. The meeting with Monique Smith, MPP and Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Health, was an excellent opportunity to spell out in detail the issues raised in our position paper *Finding My Place*.

Ms. Smith was knowledgeable about the issues and encouraged the MS Society to formally bring our recommendations forward during the public hearings on Bill 140, the Long Term Care Homes Act, 2006. She is responsible for guiding Bill 140 through the legislature and in 2004 was responsible for developing *Commitment to Care*, a discussion paper on long-term care in Ontario.

The MS Society will be making a formal presentation about the important issue of age-appropriate long-term care to the Standing Committee on Social Policy in January.

MS Society Represented at End Exclusion Forum

As a national partner, the MS Society of Canada promoted the End Exclusion campaign which was developed to mark the 25th anniversary of the International Year of Disabled Persons and the publication of the *Obstacles* report by the federal government 25 years ago. Ontario Division Board of Directors member Karen Torrie-Racine and OSAC member Yassemin Cohanin very ably represented the MS Society at the End Exclusion forum in Ottawa in early November. The event marked the 25th anniversary of the International Year of Disabled Persons and the release of *Obstacles*, the first Parliamentary report on disability and the 10th anniversary of *Equal Citizenship for Canadians with Disabilities: The Will to Act*, the report by the task force headed by MP Andy Scott.

Government Relations/ Social Action Workshop

Planning is underway for a government relations training workshop in early 2007 for chapter and unit volunteers. External funding for the workshop is Pfizer Canada and Bayer Canada thanks to excellent work by Yolanda Bronstein of the Major Gifts/ Planned Giving Department. OSAC established a subcommittee to assist with workshop planning. Members include Cathy Topping, Daniella Bernard, Ian Greaves, Andrea Butcher-Milne and Deanna Groetzinger.

National Government Relations Brief to Finance Committee

If you are interested in learning about MS Society government relations activities on the federal level, a good place to start is the MS Society's brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance. MS Society representatives presented key recommendations to the committee at one of its public hearings in September and have continued to press the issues this fall through meetings with MPs and government officials. You can find the brief at www.mssociety.ca [key word search: brief finance committee 2006].

Government Relations and Social Action E-Alerts Online

The Government Relations and Social Action Alert newsletter is available online. Just go to www.mssociety.ca/ontario and click on Government Relations & Social Action/ Social Action Alert.

Deanna Groetzinger
Vice-President, Government Relations & Policy

To unsubscribe from the Government Relations and Social Action E-Alert list, please send an e-mail with "Unsubscribe" in the subject line to: Deanna.groetzinger@mssociety.ca \ont-sa-alert-dec06