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VIA E-Mail and Chapter Mail

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Government Relations and Social Action E-Alert

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Recruitment – Patient Members for Committee to Evaluate Drugs

The Ontario government is recruiting two patient members for the Committee to Evaluate Drugs (CED). **The deadline for applying is April 16, 2007.** The CED provides advice to the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care on drug-related matters, including providing recommendations as to which drugs should be listed on the provincial drug formularies for reimbursement. This is the first time that the CED will include people who are not health care professionals. Information about the application process as well as application forms are at the following link on the Ontario Public Appointments Secretariat website: <http://www.pas.gov.on.ca/scripts/en/AdvPosDetails.asp?num=1>

Ontario Government Budget Highlights

The Ontario government released its budget on March 22. Overall, the budget indicates a \$300 million surplus in 2006-07 and surplus of \$400 million for 2007-08. On the spending side, while the budget did not contain measures specifically addressing MS issues, it did include a number of initiatives that impact people with MS in a variety of ways. More details about programs will be provided when they become available. Specific items in the budget include:

- A new Ontario Child Benefit has been created. It combines social assistance payments to children and the Ontario Child Care Supplement into one benefit which will be paid to all low-income families. Because the benefit (at a reduced rate) will continue even after parents leave social assistance this should eliminate the current controversial clawback of the National Child Benefit Supplement.
- Social assistance and Ontario Disability Support Plan rates are to rise by 2 percent beginning November 2007.
- The minimum wage will rise to \$10.25 over the next three years.
- A new provincial housing allowance of \$10 per month has been created for eligible families.
- As well, the budget contained \$127 million for municipalities to use for new affordable housing or to renovate existing housing.
- The budget provides \$8 million over three years for the new Human Rights Legal Support Centre, included in the legislation that changed the Ontario Human Rights Act last year.
- Funding was provided for the new Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion.

Federal Government Budget Highlights

The federal government released its budget on March 19. The budget included several initiatives which should have positive implications for people with disabilities. The initiative which attracted the most attention was the new Registered Disabilities Savings Plan (RDSP) to help parents and guardians establish long-term savings for family members with severe disabilities. The RDSP will come in effect in 2008 and can be established for any individual who is eligible for the disability tax credit. Contributions to the RDSP can be made until the beneficiary is 59 years old. The federal government will match contributions up until the beneficiary turns 49 to a maximum of \$70,000. Details about all initiatives will be provided when they become available. Other highlights include:

- The creation of an Enabling Accessibility Fund to improve physical accessibility for persons with disabilities. The budget commits \$45 million over three years for the fund. Details about what will be eligible and how to apply are being developed by the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development.
- The restoration of the Canada Summer Jobs program to provide subsidies for non-profit organizations, the public sector and small businesses to hire students. It is similar to the program that was cut last September.
- The establishment of a Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB) to assist encourage low-income workers to stay in the workforce. An additional supplement will be available for low-income workers who have disabilities. The WITB will be provided as a refundable tax credit effective for the 2007 tax year.
- The provision of up to \$612 million to support provinces and territories that have committed to implement patient wait time guarantees. One of the guarantees was for access to diagnostic technology such as MRI scanning.

Tax Tips Article on MS Society Website

With the deadline for filing income taxes closing in, an article highlighting ways to save on the taxes you owe is posted on the MS Society website. Here is a direct link to the article: <http://www.mssociety.ca/en/information/taxTips.htm>

VIA Rail Must Become Accessible

On March 23, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that VIA Rail must make its rail cars more wheelchair accessible. The ruling upheld a similar decision by the Canadian Transportation Agency in 2003 which VIA Rail appealed. As a result of the Supreme Court decision, VIA Rail will have to alter 40 of approximately 100 of the Renaissance rail cars that it bought from France in 2000 at a greatly reduced cost. At the time, VIA Rail said it would make the necessary changes to make them wheelchair accessible, but then claimed it would cost too much. The Canadian Transportation Agency ordered VIA Rail to make the changes but the company appealed the decision to the Federal Court of Appeal which ruled it did not have to make the upgrades. At that point, the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CDA) led the appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada. The MS Society and a number of other organizations supported CDA's initiative.

Government Relations/ Social Action Workshop

Making a Difference Today, the first chapter/ unit government relations training workshop in Ontario Division, will take place April 28 and 29 in Toronto. Registration information has been distributed to all chapters and units.

Arch Alert Available Online

The April issue of Arch Alert will be available shortly at www.archdisabilitylaw.ca. Check out the ARCH article on tax tips as well as more information about the Ontario and federal budgets. Published by the ARCH Disability Law Centre, it provides updates about recent legal issues of interest to people with disabilities. The MS Society of Canada is a member of ARCH.

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.

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