

**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](http://www.mssociety.ca)

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VIA E-Mail and Chapter Mail

**Distribution:**

Chapter/ Unit Chairs & Executive Directors  
Ontario Social Action Committee  
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**Federal Election Results and the MS Society**

The MS Society is poised to work with the new minority Liberal government headed by Prime Minister Paul Martin. Prior to the election, the National Government Relations Committee developed questions for candidates on key priority issues and encouraged MS Society members to ask all candidates how their parties would address our concerns.

Health care was a major focus throughout the campaign and most parties talked about the need for better home care and pharmacare. Many promises were made, and the MS Society will be diligent in working with government ministers and members of Parliament to ensure those promises are kept. Income support concerns related to the disability tax credit and the Canada Pension Plan disability benefits were not a major campaign focus. The MS Society will continue to work with ministers and MPs on tax and pension policy improvements.

**Increased Funding for Home Care in Ontario**

On July 5, 2004, the Ontario government reiterated the information provided in the May budget that it will provide \$1.3 billion to Community Care Access Centres (CCACs) this year. This includes new funding of \$73.2 million for acute home care, end-of-life care and chronic home care. The announcement described this funding as being the first phase of the government's plan to provide home care services to keep people out of hospitals and reduce the stress on institutions.

The MS Society of Canada has been concerned in the past and repeated its concerns recently to Premier Dalton McGuinty, Minister of Health George Smitherman and other key ministers that home care for people with chronic diseases and disabilities remains underfunded. The fact that chronic home care services are specifically mentioned in the July 5 announcement is encouraging that our concerns are being heard. We will continue to press the government to include the widest possible range of home care services for people with chronic health needs.

Another concern that we brought to the attention of the Premier and the Minister of Health is the delisting of physiotherapy services after the current 2004-05 fiscal year. A letter from MS Society Ontario Division Chair Tom Epp pointed out that physiotherapy services help people with MS maintain mobility and independence. The MS Society position is backed by many of the MS Clinics in Ontario.

## **Additional Funding for Home & Vehicle Modifications**

There was good news and bad news in a recent announcement by Sandra Pupatello, Minister of Community and Social Services. The good news is that there is an additional \$10 million in funding for the Home and Vehicle Modification Program. The program provides grants for modifications to homes (lifts, elevating devices, ramps, wheel-in showers, etc.) and to vehicles (hand controls, lifts, safety devices, etc.) Funding of up to \$15,000 is available for each program (\$15,000 for home modifications, \$15,000 for vehicle modifications; up to \$30,000 if combined). People with combined household incomes of more than \$35,000 per year may be required to contribute to the cost of the modifications. People with combined household incomes of more than \$65,000 are not eligible. The program is administered by the Ontario March of Dimes. (For more information, go to [www.dimes.on.ca](http://www.dimes.on.ca) then click on Programs and Services and then on AccessAbility™ Services or call 1 877 369-4867.)

The bad news is that the expanded program (it now includes children with physical disabilities) will be funded in part by the cancellation of the Retail Sales Tax Rebate paid on purchases of cars and vans to transport people with permanent physical disabilities. Since this program did not have an income cap, some people with MS may find they have decreased access to provincial financial support because of this cancellation. They can no longer claim a Retail Sales Tax Rebate, but their household income may make them ineligible for the Home and Vehicle Modification Program.

The MS Society wants to know if people with MS are disadvantaged by this change so we can provide feedback to the government of Ontario. **Please provide input** to Deanna Groetzinger ([deanna.groetzinger@mssociety.ca](mailto:deanna.groetzinger@mssociety.ca) or fax: 416 922-7538)

## **Announcement on Increased Community Care**

July 7, Minister of Health and Long-term Care George Smitherman announced the government will provide \$29.1 million this year for services to keep people with disabilities and the frail elderly in their homes. Services mentioned in the news release were adult day programs, meal services, friendly visiting, care giver supports, supportive housing. These

are services that are important to many people with MS – along with home care – in enabling them to stay within their own homes instead of having to move to long-term care institutions at much greater cost. The MS Society has consistently urged the current government and the previous ones that it is more cost effective to provide a wide variety of supportive services to people in their homes instead of making people enter hospitals and other institutions.

The funds will be provided to agencies that provide services within communities and supportive housing programs. The MS Society will provide details about the programs as they become available.

## **Automatic Renewals for Trillium Drug Program**

The Trillium Drug Program has announced an automatic renewal process for families who are currently enrolled with the program. People enrolled for the 2003-04 fiscal year will be automatically renewed for the 2004-05 fiscal year. The new year for the Trillium Drug Program begins August 1, 2004. Because of changes to the forms, there was a delay in distributing the new forms although they are now being mailed to current enrollees. This delay led to concerns that people might have a gap in coverage.

The announcement of automatic renewal is welcome. However, people will need to submit the renewal form once they receive it in the mail along with information about their 2003 income.

People applying to the Trillium Drug Program for the first time can find the new application form online on the Ministry of Health website: go to [www.health.gov.on.ca](http://www.health.gov.on.ca) and then click on Public Information and then on Forms. The renewal form is not available on the website.

## **Survey on DTC Application Form**

The MS Society of Canada website home page includes a link to a survey about the Disability Tax Credit application form (T2201). The revised form came into effect January 1, 2004. The DTC coalition (in which the MS Society is a leader) developed this survey to find out whether the revised form is easier to use and if there are other concerns that we should bring to the attention of the Canada Revenue Agency. The survey is hosted on the Arthritis Society website. To fill out the survey, click on the link below to the MS Society home page and scroll down to the fifth item where you can click on the link to the survey.  
([www.mssociety.ca](http://www.mssociety.ca))

## **MS Society Input to Ontario Drug Programs Branch**

Recently, the MS Society provided information to the Ontario Drug Programs Branch (ODB) on MS treatment optimization and urged the ODB to adopt this approach in determining eligibility for Section 8 requests for drug cost reimbursement of the four disease modifying therapies. Currently the ODB uses criteria from each therapy's pivotal clinical trial and does not take actual clinical practice into consideration. The paper Treatment Optimization in Multiple Sclerosis was written by Drs. Mark Freedman, David Patry, François Grand'Maison,

Mary Lou Myles, Donald Paty and Daniel Selchen and published in the May 2004 issue of the *Canadian Journal of Neurological Sciences*.

## **ODA Policy Conference in London**

People in the London area may want to mark September 11 on their calendars. The Ontarians with Disabilities Committee in cooperation with King's University College, University of Western Ontario, is holding a public conference on the ODA. The conference is being held in advance of anticipated legislation to be introduced this fall to strengthen the existing Ontarians with Disabilities Act. The deadline to register for the conference is August 15. For more information, contact Kathy Lewis (Tel: 519 645-0558 or [kathylewis@rogers.com](mailto:kathylewis@rogers.com)) For information about ODA Committee activities go to its website ([www.odacommittee.net](http://www.odacommittee.net))

## **Social Action Alerts Going Online**

The Social Action Alert newsletter is going online. This issue and a previous issue are being posted to the MS Society website. Just go to [www.mssociety.ca/ontario](http://www.mssociety.ca/ontario) and click on Social Action. Future issues will be posted to the website on a regular basis.

Deanna Groetzinger  
Vice-President, Communications

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