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VIA E-Mail and Chapter Mail

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Distribution:

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Social Action Directors, Chapters/ Units
Ontario Government and Community Social Action Committee
Ontario Executive Committee & Board
Social Action E-Network
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(Please forward to other interested members)

Government Relations and Social Action Alert

- **Update – Campaign to Restore Physiotherapy and Home Care Funding**
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Update – Campaign to Restore Physiotherapy and Home Care Funding

The MS Society continues to take the physiotherapy issue directly to MPPs. On April 1, the Ontario government plans to make major changes to who is able to receive OHIP coverage for physiotherapy. The MS Society has been working hard to persuade Minister of Health George Smitherman to base physiotherapy coverage on a doctor's prescription. We are pointing out that someone's age or where they receive the services should not be a factor in whether it is paid for or not. The important thing should be the doctor recognizing that someone could benefit from physiotherapy and writing a prescription.

While it is not entirely clear what changes will come into effect April 1, the MS Society has been very pro-active in making our position known. In January, background information and a sample letter for MPPs were sent to all chapters and units to use in contacting their own MPPs. Many chapters have already followed up. In February, following an article in *The Globe and Mail*, the MS Society sent a letter to the editor explaining our position. The letter and a covering note were then sent to all MPPs. Several opposition MPPs have responded already, saying they agree with our position.

We need to get that same message across to Liberal MPPs. If you have not done so already, please write a letter or call your MPP. You can find background information about this important issue and a sample letter in the January 14, 2005 *Government Relations and Social Action Alert* posted at www.mssociety.ca/ontario under Social Action/ Social Action Alert.

Update – Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

Bill 118, the proposed *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act* (AODA), will be back before the Ontario Legislature's Standing Committee on Social Policy on March 18 to consider proposed amendments from each of the three parties. On March 29, the committee will begin considering the amendments during its clause-by-clause examination of the bill. It is possible this phase will continue the following week on April 4 and 5. Once the committee has wrapped up its work, it will send the bill as amended to the Ontario Legislature for third reading debate and ultimately approval. There is no timeline as yet for third reading.

Kris McDonald, co-chair of the Ontario Government and Community Social Action Committee (OSAC), set the tone as the initial presenter at the January 31 afternoon hearing in Toronto on Bill 118: *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act* (AODA). She presented the MS Society brief to the Standing Committee on Social Policy and vividly illustrated the need for a more accessible Ontario. She gave committee members some real life stories about the difficulties that she and other people with disabilities have in using public transportation, shopping and other everyday situations.

This scenario was repeated across Ontario with a number of people with MS providing input to the committee as it traveled to London, Ottawa, Niagara Falls and Thunder Bay. In London, volunteer Bonnie Maas told the committee that while the MS Society was very supportive of the proposed legislation that we urge a shorter time frame than 20 years for full implementation.

The MS Society brief emphasizes the development of standards that can facilitate the activities of daily living; publicly accessible monitoring of progress, effective enforcement and an easy-to-use complaints process. The brief is on the MS Society website at www.mssociety.ca/ontario under Social Action/ Documents and Letters. People who are interested in reading the oral presentations made to the Standing Committee on Social Policy during the public hearing phase (January 31 – February 8, 2005) will find them at http://www.ontla.on.ca/hansard/committee_debates/38_parl/session1/SocialPol/index.htm

Update – Outreach to Chapters and Units

Members of the Ontario Government and Community Social Action Committee (OSAC) have been calling chairs and social action directors of chapters and units to find out about local issues and to provide an opportunity for people to be added to the E-Alert for Government Relations and Social Action. They report to date that accessible transportation and access to the wider community are important issues at the local level. The outreach project will enable OSAC to develop more effective ways to interact with chapters/ units.

Government Relations and Social Action Alerts Online

The Government Relations and Social Action Alert newsletter is available online. This issue and previous ones are posted to the MS Society website. Just go to www.mssociety.ca/ontario and click on Social Action/ Social Action Alert.

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