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VIA E-Mail and Chapter Mail

Distribution:

Chapter/ Unit Chairs & Executive Directors
Ontario Government and Community Social Action Committee
Ontario Executive Committee & Board
Social Action E-Network
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Government Relations and Social Action Alert

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First Ministers Meeting on Health Care

The MS Society of Canada provided input to both federal and Ontario officials prior to the First Ministers meeting on health care in mid September. The resulting agreement answered some of the concerns expressed in letters from the chair of the National Government Relations Committee to Prime Minister Paul Martin Minister of Health Ujjal Dosanjh, and from Ontario Division Chair Tom Epp to Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty and Minister of Health and Long-Term Care George Smitherman

Federal spending on health care will go up – an additional \$18 billion is designated for medicare over six years. Some of the spending will go to areas that are of concern to people with MS including initiatives to reduce wait times for procedures such as MRIs, additional work on a national pharmaceutical strategy and better reporting on health system performance. However, the agreement did not address our issues of the need for home care for people who have chronic diseases such as MS. These issues will continue to be priorities for government relations and social action in Ontario and at the federal level through the National Government Relations Committee.

ODA Conference and Anticipated Amendments

Advocates for a more accessible Ontario gathered in London September 11 at a conference called Still Waiting. Organized by the Ontarians with Disability Act Committee in London, for the first time a provincial Citizenship Minister actually attended an ODA Committee forum.

Minister Marie Bountrogianni re-affirmed the government's commitment to introduce legislation to strengthen the existing ODA. She repeated this in an announcement on September 30 at which time she also announced the public posting of each ministry's annual accessibility plan. The plans can be viewed on the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration Accessibility Ontario website: <http://www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility> We will all be looking forward to finding out if the amendments will follow the recommendations made during the Ontario-wide consultations last winter.

Thanks for Input on Vehicle Retail Sales Tax Change

The September issue of *MS Ontario* asked people for MS to comment on the recent cancellation of the Retail Sales Tax Rebate paid on purchases of cars and vans to transport people with permanent physical disabilities. A number of people have responded already saying the cancellation of the rebate is worrisome since they may not be able to qualify for the expanded Home and Vehicle Modification Program which is administered by the Ontario March of Dimes. The MS Society will bring forward these concerns to the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Ontario March of Dimes to assist them in making the program better. To find out if you would qualify for a grant to make modifications to your home (lifts, elevating devices, ramps, wheel-in showers, etc.) and/or to your vehicle (hand controls, lifts, safety devices, etc.), go to www.dimes.on.ca then click on Programs and Services and then on AccessAbility™ Services or call 1 877 369-4867.

De-listing of Physiotherapy Services

The de-listing of physiotherapy services as of April 1, 2005 is causing much concern among people with MS and health care professionals. The MS Society has raised this concern about de-listing several times with the Minister of Health and Long-term Care. Very shortly, chapters / units and concerned individuals will be asked to contact your own MPP about issue. Look for a letter and speaking points that you can which will be e-mailed to you and distributed through the chapter mail system.

Committee Name Change

The volunteer advisory committee that provides input on government and social action activities has a new name: *Ontario Government and Community Social Action Committee*. Members expanded the name to reflect the fact that we work both with government and within local communities to ensure that people with MS in Ontario have the opportunity to participate fully in all aspects of life. The committee is composed of MS Society members across Ontario. The chair is Cathy Topping of St. Thomas.

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.

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