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Government Relations and Social Action E-Alert

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MS Society pre-budget submission

The MS Society provided a submission to this Ontario's 2009 pre-budget consultations. The MS Society's submission called for the Government of Ontario to:

- Exempt Registered Disabilities Savings Plans (RDSPs) from the asset and income calculations under the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and the Ontario Works Program.
- Allocate a portion of the Long-Term Care Renewal Strategy to create additional age-appropriate spaces for younger people who require long-term care.
- Develop regulations and policies regarding the placement of younger adults with MS and other disabilities to ensure they receive care in age-appropriate settings.
- Commit to the development of an Ontario Brain (Neuro) Strategy in Budget 2009 and in the Budget speech.
- Direct ministries that serve Ontarians with neurological conditions to work with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the NHCC, LHINs, community service providers, and other key stakeholders over the next 3-5 years to develop and cost the Brain Strategy.

The full submission is available at http://www.mssociety.ca/ontario/pdf/ont_2009_pre-budget_submission.pdf.

Ontario exempts RDSPs from ODSP calculations

Shortly after the MS Society presented its pre-budget submission, the Government of Ontario announced changes to social assistance regulations exempt Registered Disabilities Savings Plans (RDSPs) from the asset and income calculations under the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and the Ontario Works Program. With these changes:

- RDSP contributions will not impact eligibility for social assistance;
- People on social assistance will be able to take money out of an RDSP without affecting their social assistance payments.

The MS Society advocated for these changes and applauds the Government of Ontario for implementing them. Ontario is also increasing the amount that recipients of social assistance can receive as a gift or payment from a trust from \$5,000 to \$6,000 a year.

For more information visit <http://www.mcass.gov.on.ca/mcass/english/news/releases/081130.htm>. For more information on RDSPs, see <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/gncy/bdqt/2007/rdsp-eng.html> and <http://www.rdsp.com/>.

Exceptional Access drug approval process streamlined for MS drugs

The MS Society has advocated for improved access to drug therapies by ensuring that MS medications are available under Ontario Public Drug Programs and that the process of obtaining medications is simple, understandable, and quick.

In November, the Government of Ontario introduced a Telephone Request Service (TRS) for the Exceptional Access Program (EAP) – formerly “Section 8” – for drug renewals. Through the TRS, physicians can request EAP drug renewals over the phone. In most cases, requests and renewals will be approved during the call, which will reduce the waiting period that individuals go through under the current paper-based system.

Forty Exceptional Access drugs will be made available through the TRS, including renewals for the 4 MS disease-modifying therapies currently available through the EAP (Avonex, Betaseron, Coxapone, and Rebif).

The Telephone Request Service is available for these four medications on a *renewal* basis only; that is, physicians will still be required to submit a paper-based application for initial Exceptional Access requests for Avonex, Betaseron, Coxapone, and Rebif. After initial access is granted, physicians may use the TRS to seek renewal of Exceptional Access for these medications.

For more information visit http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/drugs/eap_trs.html.

Attendant Services initiatives

Ted Arnott, MPP, Wellington-Halton Hills, introduced a private members resolution calling on the province to reduce wait times for Attendant Care Services, asking that these services be added to the provincial Wait Time Strategy (http://www.health.gov.on.ca/transformation/wait_times/wait_mn.html). For additional background, please see the story that ran in the *Guelph Mercury* at <http://www.guelphmercury.com/pdfs/2008Nov1/A05.PDF>.

Mr. Arnott was motivated to do this by a constituent who met with him to discuss a report released by the Ontario Community Support Association this summer, which was circulated in the August 28 edition of the *Social Action E-Alert* (<http://www.mssociety.ca/ontario/pdf/ont-sa-alert-20080828.pdf>).

Ontario Poverty Strategy announced

Ontario's Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction has released its Poverty Reduction Strategy. The full report can be found at <http://www.growingstronger.ca/english/default.asp>.

While the Strategy does mention people with disabilities, its primary focus is on reducing child poverty. However, in the report the Cabinet Committee notes that the province must recognize the diversity of poverty (among children, families, people with disabilities, Aboriginal peoples, immigrants, women, etc.), stating that "the unique needs of these groups require tailored solutions and we know that we need to continue to view the issue of poverty from these perspectives going forward."

The Strategy also highlights some of the recent initiatives that have been implemented to help reduce poverty among people with disabilities.

Court upholds One Person, One Fare policy

On January 10, 2008, the Canadian Transportation Agency ordered Air Canada, Air Canada Jazz and WestJet to adopt a One-Person-One-Fare Policy for persons with severe disabilities on flights within Canada.

The Decision means that, for domestic services, these carriers may not charge more than one fare for persons with disabilities who:

- are accompanied by an attendant for their personal care or safety in flight, as required by the carriers' domestic tariffs; or
- require additional seating for themselves, including those determined to be functionally disabled by obesity.

In February 2008, Air Canada, Air Canada Jazz and WestJet sought leave to appeal to the Federal Court of Appeal. In May 2008, the Federal Court of Appeal dismissed the airlines' application. In August 2008, the airlines applied to the Supreme Court of Canada for leave to appeal the Federal Court of Appeal's Decision to dismiss their application.

On November 20, 2008, the Supreme Court of Canada dismissed Air Canada, Air Canada Jazz and WestJet's application for leave to appeal. The Agency's January 2008 Decision stands. Air Canada, Air Canada Jazz and WestJet are expected to comply with the Agency's Decision on One-Person-One-Fare Policy. The airlines are to implement the Policy by January 10, 2009. This is great news for people with severe disabilities across Canada. For more information, see http://www.cta-otc.gc.ca/access/surv-rpts/081119_e.html.

More MPs for Ontario

It looks like Ontario may get its "fair share" of MPs after all. Premier Dalton McGuinty announced earlier this week that Prime Minister Stephen Harper will grant the province 21 additional seats in the House of Commons proportional to the province's share of Canada's population. For more information, see

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20081217.wseats1218/BNStory/politics/home>.

*Season's Greetings from the MS Society's
Government Relations Team!*

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