



MS Society Caregiver Network

The MS Society of Canada is pleased to launch a new quarterly newsletter for members of the MS Society Caregiver Network. This newsletter is designed to provide you with up-to-date information about Caregiving in Canada including local programs, advocacy initiatives, resources and general information and support. Please feel free to share it with others and encourage others to join the network by simply visiting the caregiver webpages of the MS Society of Canada website at www.mssociety.ca

I am a caregiver of someone with MS

Whether you are a spouse, partner, parent, child, family member or friend providing care on a regular basis to someone with MS, your role is an important one. The term “caregiver” is very broad and can include any person at any age and often, there is more than one caregiver who provides care.

The bond between a person with a chronic disease such as MS and the person, who provides care, can be very strong and very positive. At the same time, caregiving can also be physically and emotionally demanding and exhausting.

No matter the extent of your caregiving, it is important that you also take care of yourself.

The MS Society recognizes the incredible contribution that caregivers make at a personal level, and we are committed to supporting you.

The MS Society provides a range of resources and support for caregivers.



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Share Your Story!

Do you have an inspiring story you would like to share with others?

Submit your caregiver profile to the MS Society today for the chance to be profiled on our National website!

Contact us at abidah.lalani@mssociety.ca for more information.

Caregiver issues raised during election campaign

By Deanna Groetzinger

Vice-President, Government Relations and Policy

We are making a difference in putting the needs of caregivers in front of politicians and there is increasing evidence that they are listening. In addition, the recent election campaign gave us a great opportunity to talk to candidates about caregiver issues.

The budget that the Conservative government tabled right before the election was called introduced a new Family Caregiver Tax Credit. For the first time, spouses, common-law partners and minor children would have been able to claim a non-refundable credit for some tax relief.

With the re-election of the Conservatives, it is anticipated the new budget, expected sometime in June, will include the proposed Family Caregiver Tax Credit.

The MS Society has been advocating for a number of years that spouses and common-law partners be recognized for their caregiving roles by allowing them to claim the caregiver tax credit. While the amount to be claimed would be small, it is a great step forward to have this need – and our advocacy efforts – recognized.

During his budget speech, Minister of Finance Jim Flaherty used MS as an example in introducing the Family Caregiver Tax Credit saying: “Another (caregiver) may be helping his wife as she faces the challenges of MS.”

The Liberal Party has also had a focus on caregivers. In October 2010, the Liberals announced a proposal for caregivers called the Family Care Plan. It includes a new six-month Family Care Employment Insurance Benefit to help people care for gravely ill family members at home without having to quit their jobs; and a new Family Care Tax Benefit, modeled on the Child Tax Benefit, to help low-and middle-income family caregivers who provide essential care to a family member at home – including spouses and common-law partners.

It's exciting that both the Conservatives and the Liberals are actively promoting programs for caregivers. This is something we encouraged our members to talk about with all candidates during the election campaign. In addition, please continue to send messages to the MP's in your riding about this issue and others of importance to people affected by MS.

New Caregiver Resources

We are pleased to announce a number of updates to the Caregiver section on the Living with MS website. The new features include a place for caregivers to join the MS Society Caregiver Network to receive information and updates on local programs and caregiver initiatives across the country.

In addition, users will be able to submit their profiles as a way of sharing their personal story with other caregivers. Information, resources, support and services can also be accessed through this page, as well as comprehensive information about financial and legal issues pertaining to caregivers.

For more information, visit <http://mssociety.ca/en/help/iAmaCaregiver.htm>

Tips for Caregivers: How to Avoid Caregiver Burnout

By: *Emily Murray, BScH, MA (Health Promotion) Candidate*

1. Do not handle everything alone.

It is important to have realistic expectations. You are only one person and you cannot do everything. Get help. Maximize your support network by seeking out resources available through the MS Society, community groups, health professionals and the government. Do not discourage others from helping you and do not feel ashamed by asking for help.



2. Talk to others.

Openly discuss your concerns and fears with someone that you trust. Be aware that you need emotional support too. Talking to others not only relieves stress, but can give you a new perspective on things as well. If joining a support group is of interest to you, contact the MS Society to see what programs are available in your area. Contact health professionals if you have specific health-related concerns.

3. Maintain your social connections.

Do not isolate yourself from your community. Attend social events and participate in recreational activities that are of interest to you. Having social support can have major health benefits and help you maintain your quality of life.

4. Do not avoid your problems.

If you are presented with an obstacle, it is better to focus on the problem at hand and develop a strategy to handle it than to put it aside. Avoiding what is bothering you will only cause you more stress.

5. Take conscious care of your health each day.

Get at least seven hours of sleep a night, eat right and get regular exercise.

6. Take time outs.

It is important to admit when you have had enough and take time away when you can no longer cope with your situation. Create a schedule that is manageable for yourself and the person that you are caring for. Make sure to include breaks, even if you only allow yourself time away for 15 minutes each day. This will allow you to increase your efficiency as a caregiver. If respite care is a possibility for you, take advantage of it.

7. Educate yourself about MS.

Information is empowering. MS can be unpredictable, but the more you know about this disease the better prepared you will be both physically and mentally to take on the challenges ahead. Learning about MS will not only allow you to create realistic expectations, but it will help you become a more effective caregiver as well. Remember that taking care of yourself is not a luxury, it is a vital necessity. By taking care of your own health, you will be in a better position to provide the best care possible. If you are showing signs of stress, or are depressed, make sure that you talk to your doctor. Caring for a person with multiple sclerosis can be extremely rewarding, but it can be exhausting as well. Stress related to caregiving can lead to health problems down the road. Therefore, it is important to take care of your physical, social and mental health needs in order to prevent becoming overwhelmed.



Canadian Caregiver Coalition welcomes measures in the Federal Budget

(The following was released following the tabling of the budget in March.)

On behalf of the millions of family caregivers across the country, the Canadian Caregiver Coalition (CCC) applauds the Federal Budget. The measures announced in the budget are an important acknowledgement of the vital role of family caregivers. The announcement of a Family Caregiver Tax Credit demonstrates the federal government's commitment to families and the caregiving responsibilities that they assume.

"Financial support for those who must take time off work is a critical component of effective policy for family caregivers", said Nadine Henningsen, CCC President. "We are pleased to see the federal government recognizing and furthering the support for family caregivers by mitigating their financial burden through this program."

There is a role for all levels of government and sectors of society to support family caregivers, which is expressed in the CCC's Caregiving Strategy. The Strategy describes how we can collectively and individually take measures to support family caregivers, providing them the safety net they require in demanding circumstances. The CCC's Caregiving Strategy includes the following elements:

- Safeguarding the health and wellbeing of family caregivers and increasing the flexibility and availability of respite care
- Minimizing excessive financial burden placed on family caregivers
- Enabling access to user friendly information and education
- Creating flexible workplace environments that respect caregiving obligations
- Investing in research on family caregiving as a foundation for evidence-informed decision making

The CCC and our partners will continue to work with the federal government to advance policy for all family caregivers in Canada.

About the Canadian Caregiver Coalition

The Canadian Caregiver Coalition is a diverse group of national and provincial organizations from across Canada that works collaboratively to represent and promote the needs and interests of family caregivers with all levels of government, and the community. The vision of the Canadian Caregiver Coalition is a Canada that recognizes and respects the integral role of family caregivers in society, and supports this role with the understanding that it is not a substitute for public responsibility in health and social care.

For more information, contact:

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President, Canadian Caregiver Coalition

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MS Answers - Caregiver Q&A

Question: I am a single father who works full time with 1 child in middle school and 2 in high school. I am also the primary caregiver for my mother who has MS and lives with us. I have read in many articles about caregiving the importance of self-care. I just don't know how I can look after myself the way I used to with 4 people dependent on me. How can I manage my time so that I include time for myself?

Answer: Carving out time for oneself is never easy, particularly when a person has as much on his plate as you do. I think the best place to start is by giving yourself permission to focus on your own needs. Taking care of yourself doesn't mean you're being selfish or shirking your other responsibilities—it means that you're doing the things you need to do to protect your physical, emotional, and spiritual health so that you can be there for those who depend on you. Like the flight attendant says, "If you are traveling with someone who needs assistance, put on your own oxygen mask first and then help with the other person's mask." The next step is to schedule some regular time for yourself every week. If you wait for the free time to happen, you'll probably be out of luck, so block out bits of time on a family calendar for everyone to see. It could be for exercise, for a hobby or working on a pet project, or for taking a class—whatever suits your fancy. Whatever you choose let your family members know the plan. Your older children may be able to help with the younger one and with grandma while you busy. If your mother needs more assistance than they can provide during those short periods, you may be able to arrange some respite care through the MS Society of Canada for more information, please visit the website (www.mssociety.ca). And churches and synagogues often have members who are interested in volunteering to help a caregiver who's in need of some down time each week. Your well-being is important—so don't be afraid to nurture and protect it.

Have a Question? Send it in. Visit www.msanswers.ca



Caregiving & Work: Workplace Survey

Researchers from the Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being at the University of Guelph, University of Alberta's Research on Aging Policies and Practice program and Work-Life Harmony Enterprises, an international research and consulting firm, based in Toronto are asking employers to participate in the Caregiving and Work Programs, Policies & Practices Survey. The survey is designed to identify which policies, practices and strategies employers use to address employees' needs for flexibility and support. The results will be used both to benchmark current policies and practices and to develop information and resources that can be used to support innovation and the implementation of effective work-life programs/policies and practices in workplaces across the country. Below is a direct link to the survey, and we invite you to share this with your employer to participate.

The deadline for submissions is June 30, 2011 http://survey.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_2ta1hbZhurhDXec



Questions, Comments or Suggestions?

Is this newsletter a helpful resource for you? Do you have an interesting topic or suggestion for our next issue? We welcome your questions, comments, and suggestions. Please send your feedback to abidah.lalani@mssociety.ca