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March 23, 2020

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Langevin Block
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A2
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cc: Hon. Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P., Deputy Prime Minister
cc: Hon. Bill Morneau, P.C., M.P., Minister of Finance
cc: Hon. Patricia Hajdu, P.C., M.P., Minister of Health
cc: Marci Surkes, Executive Director of Cabinet and Policy
cc: Jeremy Broadhurst, Chief of Staff to the Deputy Prime Minister
cc: Elder Marques, Chief of Staff to the Minister of Finance
cc: Sabina Saini, Chief of Staff to the Minister of Health

Dear Prime Minister:

The Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Society of Canada is encouraged by the Government of Canada's recently announced stimulus plan. While the stimulus plan is an effective measure to support Canadians and employers, there is more support needed to protect the ability for health charities to continue to provide support for vulnerable populations during this pandemic as outlined by our partners within the Health Charities Coalition of Canada. We are also buoyed by the announcements that you are actively seeking to stabilize businesses whose revenues are being adversely affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19. It is important to note that at times of market and economic turbulence, charitable donations tend to decline sharply.

Canada has one of the highest rates of MS in the world. Already we are seeing the multitude of impacts of COVID-19 on the daily lives of Canadians living with MS and their families. Coupled with these impacts are the challenges they already faced – struggles in the workplace, financial difficulties to make ends meet, as well as barriers in accessing Health Canada approved therapies, appropriate care, housing and caregiver and social support.

For the MS population there is considerable risk with COVID-19 due to the immune suppressant drugs that are typically used to manage their disease. This will keep them isolated longer during this period of social distancing as well as intensify these challenges noted above. The MS Society is strongly advocating to our MS community the need to social distance to stop the spread of COVID-19. However, for people living with MS, this increased social isolation puts them at greater risk for mental health issues, which is already much higher for people living with MS than the general population. We have canceled or postponed all of our in-person events, both fundraising and social support, and we are projecting substantial revenue losses that will put a significant strain on our organization and greatly impact our ability to support the MS community.

To be a leader in finding a cure for multiple sclerosis and enabling people affected by MS to enhance their quality of life.

Founding member of the Multiple Sclerosis Society International Foundation

We request that the government immediately consider the following measures to support this vulnerable MS population:

- Infusion of immediate financial supports to the MS Society of Canada to enable much needed support for caregivers and families: virtual connections with individuals and groups, psychological support for people living with MS and their caregivers, mobility and other needed equipment, as well as specific MS information and education relating to COVID-19
- Immediate extension of the Employment Insurance (EI) Sickness Benefit to at least 26 weeks

The MS Society is committed to supporting Canadians affected by MS during this difficult period. However, 98% of our operating revenue is comprised of charitable donations and the majority of those funds are raised through in-person events that are directly impacted by this decline in both donations and sponsorships. Moreover, additional sources of funding including private and community foundations are already being impacted by market uncertainties, which will affect their ability to provide funding to front-line organizations such as ours. Consequently, the MS Society is concerned about being able to meet our mission commitments including investing in important Canadian led ground-breaking research, delivering community-based programming providing a support system and advocating for Canadians affected by MS.

We request that the government immediately consider introducing special measures aimed at stabilizing the revenues of charities and non-profits with charitable status. We recommend the following measures:

- Dollar-for-dollar matching of donation by the federal government, as was seen in recent history when special measures were announced as part of disaster response policy packages.
- Federal matching dollars for research funding - an injection of new funding to non-profits like the MS Society who fund critical research in neurological diseases.
- Removing the capital gains tax on charitable donations of private company shares and real estate.
- Supporting the charitable sector through assistance from the government to build the base of donors and stimulate giving from ordinary Canadians.

We are also in support of Imagine Canada's critical sector wide recommendations to ensure the continuity and delivery of important community services. We urge you to consider all these measures as soon as possible for the sector upon which demands will now be greater. Charities play a critical role in supporting vulnerable Canadians – especially during this unprecedented health crisis.

Please accept our gratitude for the resolve with which the Government of Canada has been tackling the current crisis. It is imperative that we all work together to uphold public safety and ensure that Canada – and the health of individual Canadians – is as strong as possible as we work through these exceptional times.

Warm regards,



Pamela Valentine, Ph.D.

President and Chief Executive Officer

MS Society of Canada

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