

Policy Direction - Government Relations and Advocacy

Rationale and Relationship to Mission, Principles and Values

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada (MS Society) recognizes that government relations and advocacy is a legitimate and necessary activity in which the national office, divisions and chapters/communities can be engaged in our collective effort towards our mission of connecting and empowering the MS community to create positive change that helps realize our vision of a world free of MS. Government relations and advocacy is any activity carried out by the MS Society staff and volunteers at any level which supports the mission by seeking to improve government legislation and policies, private industry practices and/or public attitudes.

Government relations is distinguished from individual advocacy, which involves working with and/or on behalf of people affected by MS in the community to help them obtain access to needed public or private services or programs. Individual advocacy is most often carried out by MS Society programs and services volunteers or staff at the division or chapter/community level.

Policy Objective

The Government Relations and Advocacy Policy Direction is designed to indicate which level of the MS Society (national office, division or chapter/community) has responsibility for which activities; to indicate expectations regarding accountability and communications; and identify stages of government relations and explain the implications of each.

Policy Application

This policy applies to volunteers and staff at all levels of the MS Society (national office, divisions and chapters/communities).

Authorization

The policy was approved by the board of directors of the MS Society of Canada on September 4, 2014.

Policy Details

1.0 Roles and responsibilities

Each level of the MS Society works within its sphere of responsibility and collaboratively supports the efforts of other MS Society levels.

- 1.1 The National Government Relations Committee as a committee of the National Board and the staff within the Mission portfolio have the responsibility for identifying issues, setting priorities, developing and implementing strategies on a nation-wide basis and for leading our advocacy efforts to the federal government and federal agencies, nation-wide private industry and international organizations. This includes working with division volunteers and staff to identify nation-wide issues, set priorities, develop and implement strategies.
- 1.2 Within our community engagement model, Division Councils and the government relations and advocacy leads act primarily in the context of provincial and local community/municipal issues and lead the advocacy efforts therein. They work closely to ensure there is alignment within the priorities set out in our Mission portfolio nationwide and that communications are current and on-going.

2.0 Core values

Before undertaking government relations and advocacy activities, all levels of the MS Society shall ensure they are following these core values:

- 2.1 All government relations and advocacy activities are ethically defensible, in accordance with legislation and with MS Society policy directions and procedures;
- 2.2 Government relations and advocacy activities are non-partisan and not associated with a particular political party and/or government;
- 2.3 Government relations activities and advocacy are focused on results that will deliver meaningful benefit to the greatest possible number of people affected by MS and are likely to be successful;
- 2.4 Government relations and advocacy activities strive to be evidence-based and utilize published, peer-reviewed studies and official data sources, whenever possible.

3.0 Stages of activity and accountability

Government relations and advocacy activities fall into three broad stages. Each stage requires a different type of accountability and reporting.

- 3.1 Stage one – Government relations and advocacy is often done in a low-key, cooperative manner through collaboration and networking with decision makers in government, agencies, private industry and like-minded organizations and coalitions. The news media is not involved at this stage.
 - 3.1.1 During this stage, government relations and advocacy staff and volunteers shall report regularly to MS Society of Canada board of directors about the status of current or planned government relations and advocacy activities.
- 3.2 Stage two – The strategies during this stage are more public including letter-writing campaigns, petitions and news releases to the media.
 - 3.2.1 During this stage, government relations and advocacy staff and volunteers will inform and communicate to the MS Society board of directors prior to the commencement of stage two activities to ensure the activities comply with MS Society overall priorities, policy directions and procedures. Reports shall be made regularly to the MS Society of Canada board of directors.
- 3.3 Stage three – The strategies during this stage are public and may be perceived as being confrontational. They include public demonstrations and filing court challenges.
 - 3.3.1 Stage three activities shall not be undertaken unless approved in advance by the MS Society of Canada board of directors. The level of the organization considering such action shall inform the Senior Vice-President, Mission, Vice-President, Programs and Services, and/or MS Society president and chief executive officer as soon as possible if such an activity is being considered.

4.0 Prohibited activities

MS Society government relations and advocacy shall not include partisan political activities in any way, including direct or indirect support of, or opposition to a political party, public official or candidate for public office. Civil disobedience of any kind is not permitted.

Executive Champion

The Vice-President, Programs and Advocacy, is the executive champion of the Government Relations and Advocacy Policy Direction.

Monitoring and Compliance

The Vice-President, Programs and Advocacy, is responsible for reporting to the President and Chief Executive Officer through the quarterly compliance reports regarding compliance with the Government Relations and Advocacy Policy Direction.

Related Policies, Legislation

As a registered charity, the MS Society is aware and abides by Canada Revenue Agency requirements regarding the limitation on political activities. Additionally, the MS Society participates in Lobby registries as applicable in the federal, provincial, and territorial jurisdictions.

Policy Review

This policy direction is to be reviewed at a minimum every five years following its approval on September 4, 2014.

- Reviewed and approved by the Executive Team on January 29, 2020