

Policy Direction – Membership

Rationale and Relationship to Mission, Principles and Values

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada (MS Society) is a membership-based organization. Members have rights, privileges and responsibilities as detailed in the MS Society by-law. While membership may be administered at the division or chapter level, all individuals are members of the MS Society as a whole.

Organizations are required to carry out their objectives through permitted activities. In order to do so, an organization must:

- Be maintained as a legal entity; and
- Change to reflect the needs of its members, the community that it serves, and internal and external factors.

As a not-for profit corporation, the MS Society has established memberships to meet its legal obligations. The MS Society has chosen to extend membership broadly, reflecting its philosophy that members are critical to the organization's success. Members bring strength to the organization and their active participation impacts the past, current and future success of the organization.

Momentum 2015, the MS Society's strategic plan, includes, as values: the commitment to keep those affected by MS at the centre of its work at all levels of the organization; to treat everyone with respect and dignity and protect their privacy; and the acknowledgement of the grassroots of the organization as one of its greatest strengths.

Policy Objective

The objective of this policy direction is to improve alignment of membership approaches and practices across all levels of the organization and to simplify and create efficiencies in membership systems and management.

Policy Application

This policy applies to all MS Society members at all levels of the organization, as well to all staff and volunteers who manage membership programs. The policy is effective on the date of approval with an implementation period of one year from the date of approval.

Quebec Division and chapters located in Quebec are incorporated separately. The MS Society may recognize individuals holding a membership in one of these entities as holding a membership in the MS Society as long as the separately incorporated division or chapter is in compliance with MS Society policy directions and procedures. In addition, the membership application form shall clearly state that individuals holding membership in the Quebec Division or one of the incorporated chapters will also hold membership in the MS Society.

Authorization

This policy direction was approved by the MS Society board of directors on June 14, 2013.

The Executive Team* is authorized to develop detailed membership requirements and procedures to accompany this policy. The requirements and procedures are to be developed and implemented no later than six months following the approval of the policy direction. Existing membership rules and requirements will be amended after adoption of this policy; from that point forward, this policy will apply.

Policy Details

The MS Society is committed to ensuring that members can engage with the Society in meaningful ways and to creating greater alignment of membership approaches and practices to provide greater transparency and accountability to its members. To achieve these objectives, the MS Society shall:

- Maintain one membership type that will be applied across all levels of the organization.
 - **Individual membership:** an individual who has applied for membership and paid the annual or biennial (two-year) membership fee as determined by the MS Society board of directors, who has met the requirements of membership, including the new member required waiting period or existing member renewal requirements, is considered to be a member in good standing and may enjoy the rights and privileges of membership. An individual may only hold one membership at any given time.

Individuals who are interested in becoming new members of the MS Society may purchase memberships at any point during the year for a fee determined by the MS Society board of directors. Memberships generally last one year and run from January 1 to December 31 regardless of the date purchased. To reduce administrative burden, individual memberships may be purchased for two-year terms (biennial) at the rate determined by the MS Society board of directors

- Require that new members will be subject to a three-month waiting period to be eligible to vote at the annual general meeting of the MS Society. At the end of this three-month waiting period, members will be permitted to vote at the next annual general meeting of the MS Society.
- Allow for a membership lapse period of no longer than one year. An individual may renew his/her membership at any point during the one year lapse period and be entitled to all of the rights and benefits of membership upon renewal, including eligibility to vote at the annual general meeting of the MS Society.

If an individual does not renew his/her membership within a year of the renewal date, he/she will be required to become a new member and will be required to observe the three-month waiting period for new members described above.

- Ensure membership is open to all interested individuals, regardless of whether or not they have been touched by MS. The MS Society will actively promote membership broadly.
- Adopt a single membership fee that will be determined annually by the MS Society board of directors. Where there is financial hardship under any circumstance, the MS Society shall institute a process by which a membership fee may be waived on an individual basis.
- Adopt a common streamlined membership system through which all memberships will be managed.

Once this policy is adopted, a transition period will be developed to migrate existing membership types to individual memberships on or before December 31, 2013.

Honorary patrons

In accordance with the MS Society by-law, there shall be only one class of MS Society members. Only the Board of the MS Society of Canada has the power to admit individuals to membership in the Society on an honorary basis. In light of this, divisions or chapters wishing to recognize an individual's outstanding contribution to the said division or chapter shall do so by using the term such "honorary patron of chapter (or division) xxx". For greater certainty, persons designated honorary patrons of a chapter or a division shall not be members of the MS Society of Canada unless they apply for membership in the Society.

Membership Rights and Privileges

Individuals are not required to be members of the MS Society to benefit from the programs and services the MS Society provides, or to volunteer with the Society and no such requirement will be imposed on individuals by any representative of the MS Society.

The MS Society has numerous stakeholders, but only members in good standing have the exclusive right and responsibility to:

- Elect the MS Society board of directors at the annual general meeting.
- Receive the MS Society's financial statements.
- Vote on any motions that have been moved and seconded that can be properly transacted in accordance with the MS Society's governing documents, at annual or special general meetings, thereby guiding the fulfillment of the MS Society's mission.

Furthermore, members in good standing have the right to:

- Appoint auditors at the MS Society annual general meeting.
- Amend by-laws and other governing documents of the MS Society in accordance with the requirements laid out in the MS Society's governing documents.
- The choice to receive the national newsletter, the relevant divisional newsletter, the chapter newsletter if applicable, and other communications of interest as determined by the MS Society

The MS Society board of directors will review membership rights and privileges on a regular basis and may add or remove rights and privileges based upon recommendations of the MS Society governance committee.

Executive Champion

The president and chief executive officer (CEO) is the executive champion for the Membership Policy Direction and related procedures.

Monitoring and Compliance

The president and CEO is responsible for leading the monitoring of the application and compliance of this policy direction and the related procedures in conjunction with other members of the Executive Team.

Related Policies, Legislation

Other MS Society policies that complement and support this policy direction include: national and divisional bylaws, division and chapter charters and the Quebec Division and chapter affiliation agreements and the Canada Not For Profit Corporations Act.

Policy Review

The policy direction is to be reviewed at a minimum every five years following June 14, 2013. The related procedures are to be reviewed on an annual basis by the Executive Team.

Definitions:

Executive Team – Comprised of the president and CEO, chief financial officer, chief development officer, vice president of research, vice president of programs & services and the presidents of each division.