



**Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada
Saskatchewan Division
Election 2007
Political Party Questionnaire
(Saskatchewan Liberals Response)**

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada, Saskatchewan Division, is a leader in this province and Canada advocating not only for individuals affected by MS but for all disabled and chronically ill individuals. Saskatchewan has one of the highest rates of MS not only in Canada, but also in the world.

We have prepared this short questionnaire for the Saskatchewan Political Parties and their Leaders so we can inform our members about each party's position on issues that affect people who live with multiple sclerosis. Your responses will be posted on the MS Society of Canada Website and distributed to our chapters and members across the province.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to respond.

Please return the completed questionnaire by October 24, 2007, to one of the following:

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Brian R. Duck, Chairperson
Government Relations Committee
C/o Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada, Saskatchewan Division
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Leader: David Karwacki

Political Party: Saskatchewan Liberals

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1. People who experience disability because of multiple sclerosis want to live in their own homes, but many require home modifications, home care assistance, or caregiver assistance (the primary caregiver is usually a spouse or significant other) to do so. Voluntary caregivers have been described

as the invisible and unsung heroes that allow the Canadian health care system to function. Caregivers contribute more than \$5 billion of unpaid labour annually to the Canadian health care system and save governments millions of dollars in annual costs for hospitalization, long-term institutional care and home care. Currently, this type of support in Saskatchewan is not adequate for many people with MS. Often even minimal home care support can reduce emergency room visits and hospital admissions, help keep families together and prevent premature institutionalization.

The MS Society wants to know what policies your party will enact to enable people who are disabled because of MS, to stay in their own homes.

Will you:

- a. Adopt an overall home care philosophy with the goal of providing sufficient home support to individuals so they can stay in their own homes?
Yes
- b. Publicly fund a high quality and accessible home care system across the province for people with chronic diseases like MS?
Yes
We need consistency of care.
- c. Establish standards, guidelines, benchmarks and indicators to ensure best practices in home care services?
Yes
We will build on current best practices in particular medication management.
- d. Ensure necessary, high quality mobility equipment and home adaptations are funded?
Yes
- e. Provide for Medical Exemptions under the property tax rules set out by the Saskatchewan Assessment Management Agency?
Yes
- f. Recognize the significant role that caregivers play and help to reduce caregiver burn-out by increasing respite options for people with disabilities across the province? **Yes** *Either facility or home respite.*
- g. Recognize that there is significant financial hardship for a caregiver and advocate for the adoption of adequate financial support for these individuals? **Yes**
Explore the further use of tax credits.

Additional comments:

2. The Saskatchewan Aids for Independent Living (SAIL) provides assistance to people with disabilities who require mobility equipment such as wheelchairs, walkers and a variety of technological aids to remain independent. However, the quality of the equipment and aids that are offered often ***do not*** meet the needs of individuals with MS. People with MS have told the MS Society that because the cost of quality devices has risen they are required to pay more and more out of their own pockets – often from inadequate disability pensions.

Will your party increase funding for the *Assistive Devices Program* to keep up with changes in the prices of assistive devices and the development of new technology?

Yes

Additional comments:

We need to look at computerized assistive devices that increase participation in our community.

3. Some young adults with MS require institutional care. It is vital for their quality of life that their housing and care are appropriate for their age. Unfortunately, many end up in long term care centres or nursing homes that were designed for frail elderly residents and ***do not*** have the services and activities for younger disabled people. This is of particular concern to the MS Society because of the early age of onset for MS.

What will your party do to provide age-appropriate care and housing to meet the needs of younger residents?

Will you:

- a. Increase the supply of various types of age-appropriate housing across the province for people who can no longer live in their own homes due to disability?

Yes

We will work with housing authorities and urban housing authorities.

- b. Actively seek community partnerships to develop and fund age-appropriate housing for younger adults with MS and other disabilities and chronic illnesses?

Yes

- c. Develop clear policies regarding the placement of younger adults with MS and other disabilities to ensure they receive care in age-appropriate settings? **Yes**

Yes

Advance the Eden model beyond places like Sherbrooke.

Additional comments:

4. The recruitment and retention of health professionals in the Province of Saskatchewan is deemed a high priority by the MS Society of Canada, Saskatchewan Division. The MS Society of Canada is one of the largest providers of funding of MS research in Canada, awarding \$15.7 million towards research funding for the 2007 fiscal year. Our Mission is *“To be a leader in finding a cure for multiple sclerosis and enabling people affected by MS to enhance their quality of life”*. It is widely accepted that research attracts health professionals. Saskatchewan, which has one of the highest incidences of MS in the world, has difficulty attracting, encouraging and contributing to significant MS research in this province.

Will your party commit to providing an economic environment that would encourage MS research in Saskatchewan?

Yes

We have proposed greater health research funding.

Will your party commit to the creation of economic partnerships that would attract and encourage MS research in Saskatchewan?

Yes

Additional comments:

5. The primary diagnostic tool for individuals suspected of having MS is the MRI. While wait times have decreased significantly over the immediate past years the early diagnosis and treatment of MS is crucial. New drug therapies are being approved by Health Canada in a more timely manner.

In addition, more neurologists are needed in Saskatchewan, particularly in the southern part of the province. Neurologists play an important role in the diagnosis, as well as ongoing care and treatment of patients with multiple sclerosis, as well as people with other neurological disorders.

Will your party develop a province-wide strategy to ensure that MRI scans for individuals suspected of having MS, are considered urgent?

Yes

We have proposed surgical care centres with diagnostics.

Will your party address the root of this issue – that more neurologists are needed, especially in southern Saskatchewan, to order MRI testing (*and subsequently, diagnose and treat MS patients*)?

Yes

These care centres will open diagnostics for others experiencing chronic conditions.

6. New drug therapies are being approved by Health Canada in a more timely manner. The most recent example for certain people affected by multiple sclerosis is Tysabri, which was approved by Health Canada months ago, but has not been added to the provincial formulary as of yet.

Will your party ensure that the total cost of new effective drug therapies, that are approved by Health Canada, are covered under the Saskatchewan Drug Plan and that they be made available in a timely manner?

Yes

Additional comments:

We will ensure evidenced based medicine is at the forefront of our concerns.

7. The four disease-modifying drug therapies, Avonex, Betaseron, Copaxone and Rebif, have been available under the Exceptional Drug Status Program (MS Drugs Program) since 1997 and 1998. These drugs are available for people with relapsing-remitting MS who meet specific criteria. Research has proven that the earlier that people with this type of MS are treated using one of these therapies, the more beneficial. These injectable therapies reduce the number and severity of MS attacks and can slow the progression of the disease, which in turn will have long-term benefits, such as fewer exacerbations which may mean less disease activity, which in turn means that the patient may stay mobile longer, be able to stay in the workforce longer, be able to take care of their families longer and so on.

The *MS Drugs Criteria* have remained the same for ten years. Some suggested changes are: allowing patients at the discretion of the neurologist, to qualify after one MS attack; as well abolishing the yearly renewal that a patient must go through (*perhaps every three years would be more appropriate*).

Would your party consider a review of the *MS Drugs Criteria*, to consider these possible changes, and recommend that the MS Society of Canada be consulted with this review?

Yes

Additional comments:

We will consult.

8. Families who receive disability pensions are recognized as being some of Canada's poorest. The practice of clawing back children's benefits is a widespread problem.

Will your party work with other governments and insurance companies, to halt the offsetting of Canada Pension Plan (CPP) Children's Benefits?

Yes

Additional comments:

9. The federal government has, over the last-term, promised to introduce a "Canadians with Disabilities Act" to ensure the rights and freedoms of the disabled and persons who are chronically ill.

Will your party become a national leader in the advocacy of a “Canadians with Disabilities Act”, to advance the rights of the disabled and the chronically ill?

Yes

Additional comments:

10. Is there other information about your party’s policies and programs, that you would like people with MS in Saskatchewan to know about?

We want to ensure continuity of care in home care.

11. Would you like more information about multiple sclerosis and/or the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada, Saskatchewan Division?

Feel free to contact us with further information.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE.