

For Immediate Release

**LACK OF MS DRUG COVERAGE HURTING WOMEN
Women diagnosed 3.5 times as often as men**

February 22, 2007 – The lack of provincial government coverage of MS drugs is disproportionately hurting women, says the Multiple Sclerosis Society's Atlantic Division.

"While all MS patients are suffering from the lack of universal drug coverage, women are paying the heaviest toll," said Sean Kirby, Vice Chair of the MS Society's Atlantic Division. "This disease hurts women more than men. Sadly, the government's lack of drug coverage does as well."

"Because most MS patients are diagnosed between the ages of 15 and 40, this is a particularly important issue for young women," says Leslie MacLeod, President of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Newfoundland and Labrador. "With universal drug coverage, many would be able to work, care for their families and remain independent all their lives. Without universal drug coverage, they are being forced into lives of poverty and deteriorating health."

While it was previously believed that women in Canada were diagnosed with MS twice as often as men, the latest research, reported in the November 2006 issue of *Lancet Neurology*, shows the gender gap is wider than thought. Canadian women are now believed to be diagnosed with MS 3.5 times as often as men. More information on the study, which was funded by the MS Scientific Research Foundation, is available at <http://www.mssociety.ca/en/research/medmmo-sexratio-20061031.htm>.

Newfoundland and Labrador is the only province that does not provide universal coverage of the MS drug therapies to its citizens. As a result, over 600 MS patients – approximately 470 of whom are estimated to be women - do not have access to the drugs they need. Many others with MS have been forced to go on social assistance in order to qualify for drug coverage.

The lack of universal drug coverage also has terrible impacts on the provincial government's finances, the economy and communities. When MS patients cannot take their drugs, their health deteriorates and government health care costs increase as a result. When MS patients are forced to go on social assistance to get drug coverage, the provincial government ends up paying their drug costs *plus* social assistance payments and other related costs. In other words, it would be cheaper for the government to pay the drug costs for all MS patients than it is force them into poverty in order to meet government drug program rules.

The MS Society is urging the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to establish universal, 100% coverage of the MS drugs in its 2007 budget – coverage for all MS patients with no patient “co-pays.”

-30-

Contact:

Sarah Cowan

Manager of Communications and Government Relations

Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada (Atlantic Division)

Tel: (902) 468-8230

Email: sarah.cowan@mssociety.ca