A Stronger Future for Canadians with MS

MS Canada

MS Canada

Our Vision

A world free of MS.

Our Mission

To connect and empower the MS community to create positive change.

At MS Canada, we are inspired by the vision of a world free of multiple sclerosis. We focus on support, advocacy and research that will positively impact the lives of people living with and affected by MS. For over 75 years, we have been a trusted connection for the MS community to valuable resources and programs needed on their unique MS journey. We advocate for policy change that removes barriers and improves the well-being of persons affected by MS in Canada. We invest in life-changing research that will advance treatment and care, enhance well-being, help to understand and halt disease progression, and ultimately prevent MS.

What is multiple sclerosis (MS)?

MS is a neurological disease of the central nervous system (CNS), which includes the brain, spinal cord, and optic nerves. Each person is affected by MS differently.

In MS, the body's immune system mistakenly attacks myelin, the protective covering of nerve fibres. Myelin is needed to effectively send messages to and from the brain. Damage to the myelin can result in loss of nerve fibres and over time, these changes contribute to disease progression.

The most common MS symptoms include fatigue, lack of coordination, weakness, tingling, impaired sensation, vision problems, bladder and bowel problems, and cognitive and mood changes.

MS is a continuous disease process that progresses through different stages over time, and everyone experiences it differently as severity, symptoms, and response to treatment can vary from person to person. The unpredictable, episodic yet progressive nature of MS makes it particularly challenging to maintain an adequate quality of life.

MS is thought to be caused by a combination of genetic and environmental/lifestyle risk factors.

- While having a family member with MS increases the risk, environmental and lifestyle factors are major contributors to MS.
- There are several risk factors for MS such as vitamin D deficiency, adolescent obesity, smoking, and infection with Epstein-Barr virus (EBV).

Canada has one of the highest rates of multiple sclerosis (MS) in the world.

More than **90,000 Canadians** live with multiple sclerosis.

Almost **3 million people** are living with MS worldwide.

On average, **12 Canadians** are diagnosed each day.

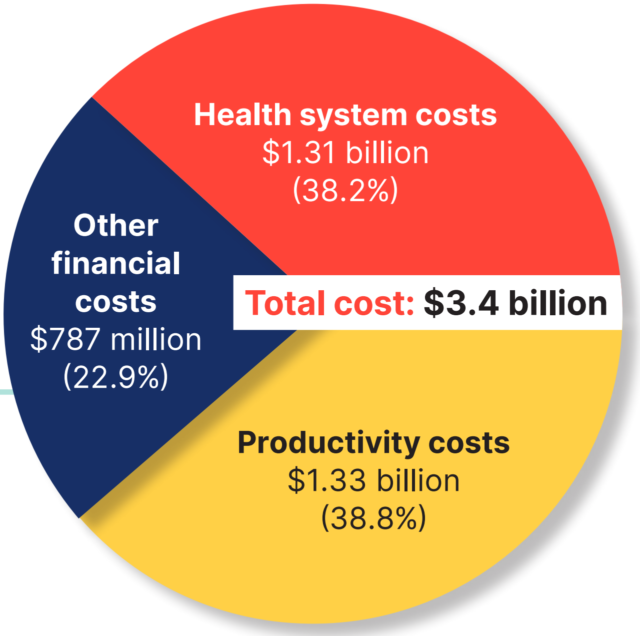
A person is diagnosed with MS **every two hours** in Canada.

Anyone can be diagnosed with MS.

Women are up to three times more likely to be diagnosed with MS than men.

A majority of adults who are newly diagnosed with MS are between the ages of 20 and 49.

Cost of MS to Canada



In a normal (non-disrupted) year, the annual cost of MS to Canada is significant, totalling more than **$3.4 billion in direct health costs, productivity loss, and other financial costs**.

Productivity loss accounts for **$1.3 billion** of the cost of MS to Canada – that includes reduced employment, absenteeism, presenteeism, premature mortality, and informal care.

The annual cost of MS per person is estimated at **$42,880**, much higher than other chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease.

Recent disruptions in Canada's health care system **caused delays in both MS diagnosis and MS treatment**, resulting in worse outcomes for Canadians living with MS.

Delayed diagnosis and disrupted treatment generated an additional **$578.2 million** in MS-related health system expenditure, productivity losses, and lost wellbeing between 2020 and 2024.

These additional health and economic costs will continue into the future, unless we take bold action now.

We work with global partners and researchers to find cures for MS.

MS Canada is currently supporting 118 research studies totaling more than $36 million in funding*:

$20.8 million
invested in 66 research studies to understand and halt disease progression

$10.6 million
invested in 32 research studies to advance treatment and care

$1.4 million
invested in 9 research studies to prevent MS

$2.08 million
invested in 10 research studies to enhance well-being

$1.2 million
invested in a national training program to support the next generation of promising MS researchers

With shifting geopolitics and growing recognition of Canada's unique role in health research, we have a timely opportunity to lead the world in advancing MS research. Canada's high prevalence of MS provides researchers with unmatched access to patient populations, longitudinal data, and clinical expertise — assets that position us for breakthrough discoveries and global leadership. Canada has cultivated a network of exceptional and world-renowned researchers, and that continued support of this network will put Canada at the forefront of discovery in the field of MS.

Recent developments in the United States highlight the importance of this investment. The US Department of Defense's MS Research Program (MSRP), which has invested more than $150 million in MS research since 2009 due to higher MS rates in the military, has been eliminated as part of broader $13.5 billion cuts to health funding. These changes will slow progress south of the border and create an opportunity for Canada to not only maintain momentum, but to step forward as the primary driver of research advances in North America. By building our own robust, stable funding model, Canada can ensure that MS research is guided by our priorities and positioned to deliver both domestic health and economic benefits and global impact.

*as of December 31, 2024

The Case for Action

MS is unpredictable, episodic, and progressive, with both visible and invisible symptoms impacting Canadians' everyday lives. MS Canada has heard the personal and profound stories of life with MS from Canadians coast to coast to coast — the obstacles to remaining in a job; the sacrifices supporting partners or adult children; the frustrating barriers to accessing care; the struggle to pay bills and make ends meet; the ongoing emotional demands of a disabling and unpredictable disease; and yet the hope that research in Canada brings.

The cost of inaction is significant. MS is a costly disease for individuals, their families, our health systems, and Canadian society more broadly. A recent study by Deloitte Access Economics highlighted the significant cost of MS to Canada, estimating the total annual cost to be more than $3.4 billion in 2019. Health system costs comprise $1.31 billion of that total. Productivity loss accounts for $1.33 billion of the cost of MS to Canada – that includes reduced employment, absenteeism, presenteeism, premature mortality, and informal care. The annual cost of MS per person in Canada is estimated at $42,880, much higher than other chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease.

Canada's economy depends on brain health.[1] The future of economic growth depends on optimizing brain capital, a form of human capital that encompasses brain health with cognitive, emotional, and social skills that drive innovation, productivity, and resilience. G7 economies are at a critical inflection point: underinvestment in brain health leaves trillions in economic potential untapped.

- The global economy loses $2.5 to $8.5 trillion annually due to lost productivity from brain disorders.
- The knowledge economy requires peak cognitive performance to sustain workforce adaptability in the face of technological innovation and AI.
- Aging populations and rising mental and neurodegenerative diseases risk impacting worker stress, retention, hurting productivity, and increasing health care and social costs.
- Geopolitical uncertainty and digital misinformation highlight the need for cognitive resilience as a national security asset.

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[1] https://sciencepolicy.ca/posts/the-brain-advantage-for-a-thriving-economy-a-global-call-to-action

Building a Stronger Future for Canadians with MS

Canada stands at a pivotal moment in the fight against MS. By investing in prevention research, boosting Canadian leadership in science and research, and modernizing the Disability Tax Credit, the federal government can make a lasting difference in the lives of tens of thousands of Canadians. These targeted, evidence-based recommendations will improve health outcomes and quality of life for people living with MS, and contribute to a more inclusive, equitable, and economically resilient Canada.

Sarah, diagnosed in 2014, PEI

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Invest to prevent MS and boost Canadian leadership in science and research

With Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) identified as a key trigger for MS, Canada has a unique opportunity to lead global prevention efforts. A $15 million federal investment, in partnership with MS Canada, will accelerate research toward a cure, reduce long-term healthcare costs, and strengthen Canada's leadership in science and innovation.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Modernize the Disability Tax Credit to bring costs down for Canadians

Modernize the Disability Tax Credit to reduce costs for Canadians with MS by updating eligibility to reflect the episodic nature of the disease, simplifying the application process, and aligning it with other disability benefits for more coordinated support.

Invest to prevent MS and boost Canadian leadership in science and research

The Opportunity

MS is believed to result from a mix of genetic, environmental, and lifestyle factors. While family history increases risk, key contributors include vitamin D deficiency, adolescent obesity, smoking, and Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) infection.

Over the past six years, research into MS prevention has grown. A 2022 Harvard study identified EBV as a key trigger for MS, sparking interest in vaccines and antivirals to reduce risk. Several EBV-targeting vaccines are in development. EBV is also linked to other chronic diseases like cancer and rheumatoid arthritis.

While available disease-modifying therapies are effective at limiting the occurrence of relapses, and in some cases, delay disability worsening, they have limited capacity to enhance or restore function. There is a need to understand the physiological mechanisms involved in brain repair and regeneration to reverse the damage done by MS and potentially recover lost function, as well as improve quality of life for people living with MS.

With shifting geopolitics and major research cuts in the United States, Canada has an opportunity to lead in MS research and reduce our dependence on the US. The US Department of Defense's MS Research Program (MSRP), created in 2009 due to higher MS rates in the military, received more than $150 million in government funding. However, the current administration has cut at least $13.5 billion in health funding, including all 2025 MSRP funding, putting future research at risk. **Canada can fill this gap.**

Key Action

Invest $15 million in MS research funding in partnership with MS Canada, leveraging our connections and expertise to:

- focus and further our understanding of MS,
- pursue leading-edge research on repair and regeneration,
- and explore strategies to prevent MS (e.g., risk factors, understanding preclinical MS, and developing and testing interventions to prevent MS).

Why It Matters

With EBV identified as a key trigger for MS, Canada has a unique opportunity to lead global prevention efforts. A $15 million federal investment, in partnership with MS Canada, will accelerate research toward cures, reduce long-term healthcare costs, and strengthen Canada's leadership in science and innovation. MS Canada has the leadership, proven track record to build capacity and coordinate research funding and infrastructure and our world-class Canadian researchers have the expertise, to propel this research forward.

Dr. Marc Horwitz

Professor, Department of Microbiology and Immunology

Lead, Autoimmune Biomedical Collaborative Research Cluster

Life Sciences Institute

Sauder Chair of Pediatric Virology

University of British Columbia

> "Canada's economy depends on brain health. When we invest in preventing MS, we're investing in our country's future.
>
> Canada and MS Canada have built the training, collaborative networks, and infrastructure that allow our MS research community to punch above its weight on the global stage. This strength has prepared our researchers and facilities well—but with sustained funding, we can keep that momentum and take the next step to lead in MS prevention research."

Modernize the Disability Tax Credit to bring down costs for Canadians

The Opportunity

Canadians with disabilities and their families face disproportionate financial challenges. People with disabilities are more than twice as likely to live in poverty as those without disabilities. Accessing financial support and managing the high costs of MS is a challenge. People living with MS often require expensive medication, rehabilitation treatments, and transportation, as well as feeding, mobility, and bathing aids.

The Disability Tax Credit (DTC) is a cornerstone of federal disability support, yet many with MS are excluded due to outdated criteria. This limits access to other benefits like the Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP) and the new Canada Disability Benefit.

What Canadians with MS Say

A year ago, MS Canada surveyed more than 1,000 people with MS about their experiences with the DTC. Nearly 40% struggled to understand the eligibility criteria, which many felt failed to reflect the episodic and degenerative nature of MS. Respondents described the criteria as overly strict, often requiring near-total disability to qualify, despite significant daily challenges. Barriers included difficulty obtaining medical documentation, high application costs, and repeated, emotionally taxing interactions with healthcare providers. The renewal process was also widely viewed as burdensome and unfair.

Key Action

Make the DTC work to bring down costs for Canadians with MS.

- Revise the DTC's eligibility criteria to recognize the fluctuating nature of episodic disabilities like MS with a multitude of severe and prolonged symptoms, which significantly impact daily life.
- Simplify the DTC application process through the creation of a more straightforward application with clear instructions, plain language, and fewer repetitive questions.
- Coordinate the DTC with other provincial and federal disability benefits to provide a comprehensive support system for persons with disabilities.

Denis, diagnosed in 1996, Quebec

Why It Matters

As the DTC increasingly determines access to programs like the Canada Disability Benefit, urgent reform is needed to ensure fair access for people with MS. Income security is fundamental to all Canadians, including people with MS and their families. Bringing down costs for Canadians with MS will enhance their quality of life, help them make ends meet, and increase productivity. Modernizing the DTC will build a more inclusive and equitable support system.

Amanda
diagnosed in 2014, Alberta

> "It's really difficult for people living with MS to fall under these very stringent guidelines that the Disability Tax Credit requires because it's just not what our lives look like. Plus, the application process is long, time-consuming, confusing, and usually comes with a cost. I have to ask my very busy neurologist to fill out long forms, taking time away from providing medical care."

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MS Canada

2025/2026 Policy Priorities

#TakeActionForMS