



(P17) THE FAMILY CAREGIVER PILOT PROJECTS AND A STRATEGY FOR SUPPORTING CAREGIVERS IN THE MS SOCIETY OF CANADA

From 2000-2005, the National Client Services department of the MS Society of Canada developed and evaluated an innovative caregiver program through a two-phase pilot project. Central to this was a Caregiver Wellness Funding Pilot Project which provided funding to a maximum of \$300/caregiver. This afforded many opportunities to hear directly from caregivers of people with MS regarding their needs and valued supports.

Three foundational principles guided the projects:

- Caregiver Voice — Caregivers should be involved in the assessment of their needs, have opportunities to express their needs and identify how they feel their needs can best be met.
- Caregiver Choice — Caregivers should have an opportunity to identify and choose individualized service options instead of having to fit into a narrowly or rigidly defined service.
- Respite as an outcome — A caregiver's relief or renewal, whether emotional, psychological, spiritual, physical and/or social, which results from services and strategies intended to help them maintain their own health and achieve greater balance in their lives. This in turn enables caregivers to secure better quality of life for themselves and the family members or friends for whom they provide care and support.

To conclude the project, stakeholders from across Canada reviewed the project findings and related implications for the MS Society's role in supporting caregivers. This resulted in a draft Strategy for Supporting Caregivers of People with MS, that includes a series of fundamental beliefs regarding caregivers arising out of project findings, and recommended actions in support of caregivers.

Broader caregiver engagement on this strategy was then sought to ensure that it accurately reflected caregiver beliefs, values and needs. Over 500 additional caregivers responded to a survey on the Strategy. Of these:

- 96% reported that the Fundamental Beliefs capture the important aspects of caregiving
- 97% felt that the Society's Recommended Actions in support of caregivers will benefit them

The Strategy was approved by the Society's National Board of Directors in November, 2005 and additional multi-year funding was secured to facilitate its implementation at all levels of the Society from coast-to-coast.

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