

May 9, 2014

Premier Kathleen Wynne Hon. Tim Hudak

Leader of Ontario Liberal Party Leader of the Official Opposition

10 St. Mary Street, Suite 210 Leader of Ontario PC PartyToronto, Ontario 59 Adelaide Street East, 4th Floor
M4Y 1P9 Toronto, Ontario M5C 1K6

Hon. Andrea Horwath Mr. Mike Schreiner

Leader of Ontario NDP Leader of Green Party of Ontario

101 Richmond St. East PO Box 1132 Station F

Toronto, Ontario Toronto, Ontario

M5C 1N9 M4Y 2T8

Dear Provincial Political Party Leaders

**Re: Surveying Your Political Party Position regarding CHS Issues/Questions**

 **During the General Election on June 12, 2014**

On behalf of the Canadian Hearing Society, we are writing today to inform you that there is a growing concern about hearing health for Ontarians and we need your support.

Hearing loss is a widespread and growing problem yet it continues to be a low priority in Ontario’s healthcare system. Ten percent of Ontarians have significant hearing loss – enough to impact their daily lives and access to information and services – and because aging is the number one cause of hearing loss, the incidence is growing rapidly, making hearing loss the fastest growing disability in Ontario.

Hearing loss is the third most prevalent chronic condition in aging adults and has important effects on their physical and mental health. Aging adults with hearing loss are at an increased risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease, other forms of dementia and diabetes. Surprisingly, the practice of testing hearing among seniors is not routine in Ontario.

Recent studies report that 1 in 5 youth has signs of hearing loss. Most common among youth is noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) which, although permanent and irreversible, is mostly preventable. Young people who have severe hearing loss often disengage socially and have an increased dependence on social support services.

Hearing loss negatively impacts household income by an average of $11,000 per year. Unassisted hearing loss costs Canada approximately $17.6 billion per year. The management of hearing loss needs to be improved to reduce the impacts on provincial health and social support systems.

During the election campaign the Canadian Hearing Society is **surveying all political parties about the following issues/questions:**

1. **Adding a referral for hearing testing as part of annual doctors’ examination for aging adults:** Do you and your party support a standardized practice of physicians adding a referral for hearing testing as part of their annual health examination for aging adults in order to ensure it is not overlooked?
2. **Ensuring prevention programs are in schools to educate youth on the importance of protecting their hearing:** Do you and your party support ensuring there are prevention programs in schools to educate youth on the importance of protecting their hearing?
3. **Improving the management of hearing loss to reduce the impact on provincial health and social support systems:** Will you and your party work to improve the management of hearing loss to reduce the impact on provincial health and social support systems?
4. **Funding for the expansion of the Canadian Hearing Society’s CONNECT mental health program:** Do you and your party support funding for the expansion of the Canadian Hearing Society’s CONNECT mental health and addictions program?
5. **Funding for the expansion of the Canadian Hearing Society’s employment services program:** Will you and your party work to improve resources and specialized service and supports so that Deaf and hard of hearing job seekers have access to secure, stable employment opportunities?

We encourage your central party to respond to these questions by June 2nd via e-mail to Gary Malkowski, Special Advisor to the President, Public Affairs at gmalkowski@chs.ca.

For additional background information, please find enclosed:

1. Toward a Hearing Healthcare Initiative for Ontario
2. Mental Health
3. The Economy and Employment
4. Cost Impact Summary for Mental Health Services, Hearing Care Counselling, General Support Services and Employment Services.

Thank you for your attention to our survey.

Yours sincerely.



Chris Kenopic

President & CEO

P.S. I have also included an important fact sheet outlining accessible election guidelines.

271 Spadina Road, Toronto, Ontario M5R 2V3

T. 416.928.2500 TTY. 1.877.216.7310 F. 416.928.2525 www.chs.ca

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