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For Immediate Release

## **4.5 MILLION CANADIANS ARE MAKING ARTHRITIS AN ELECTION ISSUE**

*An open letter to candidates in the 40<sup>th</sup> Canadian federal election*

Dear candidates,

National grass-roots health organization Arthritis Consumer Experts is calling upon each of you to address the growing arthritis crisis in Canada. Arthritis affects four and a half million people in this country, costs the economy billions of dollars per year, and disables more people than any other disease. The most serious, inflammatory forms of the disease can be devastating, debilitating, and even fatal.

Despite the enormous impact of arthritis on the economy, the health care system, and the lives of people with disease, government after government has done little—next to nothing—to address this crisis. No national strategy exists to ensure that people with arthritis have access to proper treatment and care, and arthritis receives a miniscule portion of federal government research dollars. In fact, only **\$0.93 is spent on research for every person living with arthritis**, compared to \$731 for every person living with HIV in Canada; \$14.16 for every person diagnosed with cancer and \$4.98 for every person living with diabetes.

Tragically, the absence of a cohesive government strategy to deal with this crisis has resulted in people with arthritis being left behind. In provinces and territories across the country, lives are being destroyed by this disease.

People dependent on the patchwork of drug coverage programs from province to province are unable to fill prescriptions for medications their doctors say will give them their lives back. Too few rheumatologists are practicing in Canada to treat all of the people living with serious forms of inflammatory arthritis, and general practitioners are woefully undereducated about arthritis.

Four and a half million Canadians deserve better.

Today, on behalf of our members across the country, we are asking you to listen to the voice of arthritis. When government is formed, we ask you to work with our community—and each other—to fix this crisis. Following the election, we will be contacting you to discuss arthritis issues, and we hope that we can count on you to help.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Koehn  
Person with rheumatoid arthritis  
President, Arthritis Consumer Experts

#### Facts about arthritis:

- 17%, or 4.4 million Canadians, has some form of arthritis.
- 3 out of 5 people with arthritis are younger than the age of 65.
- Musculoskeletal diseases are the leading cost driver in the Canadian health system at \$14 billion per year, surpassing diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer.
- Arthritis costs the Canadian economy more than \$6 billion per year.
- Long-term disability accounts for almost 80% of the economic cost of arthritis, with people aged 35-64 incurring 70% of these costs.
- Arthritis is the leading cause of long term work disability in Canada.
- 1 in 10 doctor visits are the result of arthritis or another musculoskeletal problem.
- Inflammatory forms of the disease, like rheumatoid arthritis, can be devastating, debilitating, and even fatal.

#### **About ACE**

Arthritis Consumer Experts (ACE) is a national organization that provides research-based information and education to Canadians with arthritis. The organization helps to empower people living with all forms of arthritis to take control of their disease and to take action in health care and research decision making. ACE is led by people with arthritis and its activities are guided by a strict set of guiding principles, and by an advisory board comprised of leading scientists, medical professionals and informed arthritis activists.

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