



May 25, 2011

Honourable Michael de Jong  
Minister of Health  
PO Box 9050, Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister de Jong:

On behalf of Arthritis Consumer Experts (ACE), I wish to congratulate you on your new role as the Minister of Health of British Columbia. As a leading arthritis advocate in BC, ACE looks forward to working with you and your Ministry staff and colleagues.

Your perspective on healthcare, and in particular Premier Clark's focus on modernizing our approach to healthy families, is crucial for the more than 600,000 British Columbians living with arthritis.

We are writing to request a meeting with you to seek the Ministry of Health's firm commitment to putting British Columbian families living with arthritis first, as part of the decision making around the ongoing reform of BC healthcare and PharmaCare drug policy.

ACE also wants to ensure that you are aware of key issues that currently affect arthritis patients.

### **Family Burden**

Arthritis is the second and third most common chronic condition reported by women and men, respectively. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada's 2010 report – Life with Arthritis in Canada – nearly two-thirds (64%) of those affected with arthritis were women. Nearly three in five people with arthritis were aged under 65 years. Furthermore, 63% of Canadians aged 18 years and over with arthritis were overweight or obese compared to 49% of those without arthritis. British Columbians living with arthritis in rural communities often fare worst in terms of accessing timely diagnosis and appropriate treatment.

With such a high number of parents and aging relatives affected in urban and rural markets, arthritis has an alarmingly major impact on BC individuals and families, with many individuals reporting fair or poor general and mental health, needing help with daily activities in addition to limitations in work, community, social and civic life.

## **Economic burden**

On average, over a quarter of men and women with arthritis between 25 and 44 years of age were not in the labour force because of their arthritis. The greatest economic burden associated with arthritis is attributed to long-term disability. Indirect costs associated with long-term disability accounted for twice the direct costs of arthritis.

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada's 2010 report - Life with Arthritis in Canada - total arthritis costs were greater in women (\$4.1 billion) than men (\$2.3 billion) because of the higher prevalence of arthritis among women. Total costs incurred by individuals within the labour force (35-64 years) were over two times higher than those incurred by the elderly (65 years and over) (\$4.1 billion and \$1.7 billion, respectively).

In BC, costs of arthritis disability have been estimated at \$572 million per year. \$6.9 billion per year in BC is attributed to lost productivity related to arthritis. This has been estimated at \$11,500 per person living with the disease<sup>1</sup> in BC based on a 2006 study by Drs. Linda Li X, Monique Gignac and Aslam H. Anis that looked at the indirect costs of arthritis resulting from unemployment, reduced performance, and occupational changes while at work.

### **ACE wants to work with you to lessen the burden of arthritis**

Over the past 11 years, ACE has worked closely with the Liberal Government on ways to lessen the burden arthritis places on families and the economy. During that time, we established a strong working relationship with your predecessors, the Hon. Colin Hansen, Hon. George Abbott and Hon. Kevin Falcon, which we hope to continue and strengthen further with you.

In order to discuss the above important points in greater detail, we request an opportunity to meet with you to confirm your Ministry's ongoing commitment to healthy living and chronic disease prevention, as well as other initiatives that relate to arthritis consumers. In this time of budget pressures, increasing funding to the diagnosis and early treatment of arthritis will result in short and long-term savings to the taxpayer. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues in reducing healthcare costs through improved services to those British Columbians living with arthritis.

Thank you for your consideration. We will follow up with your office in the coming days to coordinate a meeting at your earliest convenience.

Regards,



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President, Arthritis Consumer Experts  
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<sup>1</sup> Li X, Gignac MA, Anis AH. The indirect costs of arthritis resulting from unemployment, reduced performance, and occupational changes while at work. In Med Care. 2006 Apr;44(4):304-10