January 31, 2011

Dear Liberal leadership candidates,

Each of you is addressing healthcare, and with good reason.

The BC healthcare system is expensive and unfair, in quality and availability. The provincial healthcare budget is set to increase by approximately 20% over the next three years. British Columbia is in the midst of the most significant drug policy reform in 15 years.

As the potential new leader of the Liberal Party and this province's next Premier, your perspective on healthcare is particularly important to the more than 600,000 British Columbians who live with some form of arthritis and the over 270,000 people in BC affected by osteoporosis.

I ask for your firm commitment to British Columbian arthritis and osteoporosis patients, and that decision-making on BC healthcare and PharmaCare drug policy reform be your top priority.

Although the Government has been reforming BC's drug policy over the past three years, significant inequities still exist between services provided to British Columbians living with arthritis and osteoporosis and those living with other serious chronic diseases. In all areas of the BC healthcare system, from health promotion strategies to delivery of treatment and care, arthritis and osteoporosis are vastly underserved.

Arthritis affects more adults than cancer, heart disease, respiratory conditions or spinal cord trauma. Yet, only 54 physicians in BC are identified as having rheumatology training and a rheumatology practice. Plus, among other significant gaps, there is no consistent model of care or awareness program across the province.

For osteoporosis patients, the situation is as dire.

Unlike medications for many other chronic diseases, reimbursement of osteoporosis medications is severely restricted in British Columbia. Other provinces in Canada reimburse the cost of osteoporotic fracture medications, before patients break a bone. In BC, PharmaCare severely restricts access to clinically-proven osteoporosis medications, until a documented fracture occurs. This restriction endangers the lives and livelihoods of patients and it limits the efforts of osteoporosis physicians to prevent fractures, resulting in short- and long-term disability for their patients.

Close to one million voters in BC live with arthritis and osteoporosis and with our aging population, they represent a growing demographic. They are looking for leadership on their health issues. You may be the next premier of this province; with that will be an opportunity to make BC the best place in Canada to live for those with arthritis or osteoporosis.

BC needs a sound healthcare framework for those living with these chronic conditions. Developing and implementing sound policies will save money and reduce pressure on hospitals and waitlists by decreasing or preventing disability in people living with arthritis and osteoporosis.

We urgently need your support to increase access to medications in BC. Now. You will save money. You will improve the lives of nearly one million British Columbians. And, you will demonstrate to yourself, and to all of us, that we are a province that cares about the treatment of its patients.

As the next potential Premier of BC, will you work to make BC the best place to live with arthritis or osteoporosis?

Please take the time to answer the short questionnaire about your position on arthritis and osteoporosis prevention, treatment and care in BC.

Experts in the fields of arthritis and osteoporosis and I, as a representative of Arthritis Consumer Experts (ACE), would like to meet with you to discuss possible solutions to the problems I have mentioned in this letter. Would you consider meeting with us?

We will share your questionnaire response and results of our meeting with our members, subscribers and your constituents.

Thanks in advance for your time during a busy campaign period.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Koehn
President, Arthritis Consumer Experts

Fact sheets on arthritis and osteoporosis are available here:
* Get The Facts—Arthritis
* Get The Facts—Osteoporosis