

## Check Against Delivery

### **MS Society MLA Breakfast: A Spotlight on Alberta's MS Research April 16, 2014, Edmonton Honourable Naresh Bhardwaj, Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities, Human Services**

Good morning everyone.

It is my pleasure to be here with you today learning about the work of some outstanding people in the field of MS research in Alberta.

Thank you for your excellent and informative presentation.

It is encouraging to know we have this type of expertise available in our province.

MS directly affects thousands of Albertans, which means it indirectly affects us all.

As the Associate Minister of Services for Persons with Disabilities, I'm very interested in learning about what we need in our province to support the dreams and goals of people with disabilities and their families.

During the last few months, I've met with many Albertans with disabilities and the organizations that provide supports and services to them.

I've been hearing about the successes, challenges and opportunities that come with living with a disability.

I also know that we need to look beyond a person's diagnosis.

Instead, we must focus on the needs of the person and their family.

We need to make sure people with disabilities and their family members have access to the supports and resources they need to be successful.

We want to ensure a fair and accessible income and disability support system for people with disabilities, including people affected by MS.

But we also need to find ways of preventing MS and minimizing its effects.

That's why during the last endMS campaign, the Government of Alberta contributed \$1.5 million to research initiatives.

And it's wonderful to hear today how that research can be translated into practical ways of helping people affected by MS.

As Neil mentioned, The Way Forward: Alberta's MS Partnership, is how the Alberta government is working with many partners to have a quality system of support for people with MS in our province.

Human Services is very pleased to be involved in this partnership.

Through a number of programs, my ministry is helping to address issues for people affected by MS.

These programs include income support, assistance with employment, keeping families together or connected, and at-home supports.

One thing we have been doing is training our Alberta Supports call centre staff to provide information about help available to people living with chronic conditions.

We are also working with the MS Society to provide support to Albertans under the age of 65 who are living in continuing care facilities.

This Community Access for People in Continuing Care Initiative helps people with MS who are living in long-term care to participate in community-based activities and be involved with family and friends.

This is important because the ability to maintain and enhance personal connections is something that many people with disabilities struggle with.

Relationships must be considered when we talk about having the best possible quality of life.

For many people, their sense of connection with others and positive sense of themselves happens at work.

A significant area of focus going forward is on "Employment First" as a major vehicle to support and facilitate community inclusion.

I have the pleasure of chairing two Advisory Councils for employment.

One is made up of employers from the private sector and one has representatives from the public sector.

In both cases, I want to hear from them about what can be done to increase employment opportunities for all Albertans with disabilities and what role government can have in achieving this goal.

This is very promising and exciting work, and I am pleased to be part of these efforts in helping more people with disabilities use their skills and talents in an employment environment.

I want to end by thanking the MS Society for bringing us together today.

And I also want to thank you for your outstanding advocacy and support for people affected by MS in Alberta.

That includes a thank you to the researchers and professionals who are working hard to provide a leading and continuously improving system of care, services and support.

You have all made a great difference in helping to establish Alberta as a province known for its successes in supporting individuals and their families to live inclusive lives.

My best wishes for continued success of the endMS Network and improving outcomes for people with MS.

Thank you and have a wonderful day.