

Nova Scotia Division



a lack of sight is not a lack of vision

NOVA SCOTIA STANDS ALONE IN THE DARK: NOW THE ONLY PROVINCE THAT DOESN'T PROVIDE THE MOST EFFECTIVE TREATMENT FOR THE LEADING CAUSE OF ADULT-ONSET VISION LOSS

While other Canadians can see, Nova Scotians are left to go blind by their provincial NDP government – the same people who in opposition demanded the action they are now refusing

HALIFAX, Nova Scotia – May 4, 2010 – Nova Scotia's NDP government is making Nova Scotia unique in a very bad way and flip-flopping on their own previous position with their refusal to provide Nova Scotia residents affordable access to the newest and best treatment for the leading cause of adult-onset vision loss, wet age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

With the decision of Prince Edward Island last week to fund the treatment Lucentis, Nova Scotia now has the shameful record of being the only province in Canada that does not allow its public drug plan users to get the only treatment for wet AMD that has been shown to both stop, and even reverse, the vision loss associated with the disease.

And on top of that sorry record, the government's decision last month to not pay for the treatment goes exactly against what they demanded the previous Nova Scotia government to do when they were in opposition.

“The Nova Scotia NDP government is setting new low standards for political hypocrisy, and Nova Scotians who are going blind unnecessarily are paying the price,” said Louise Gillis, vice-president for Nova Scotia of the CCB and herself visually impaired. “In opposition little more than a year ago, the same people who last month said no to paying for Lucentis were demanding the Conservative government do so. While Nova Scotians go blind unnecessarily, the one thing that can be seen clearly is that now they are in power those NDP politicians don't care about Nova Scotians with AMD. The one

thing everyone can see, blind or not, is the ultimate in political hypocrisy from this government. They should be ashamed.”

On Nov. 5, 2008, David Wilson, NDP member of the Legislative Assembly for Sackville-Cobequid and then the opposition health critic, rose in the Assembly to ask the then-minister of health, Christopher D’Entremont, “When is his government going to recognize the benefits of Lucentis and the coverage of it here in Nova Scotia?” In asking his question, Mr. Wilson said: “Macular degeneration results in the loss of vision. It can make it difficult, or even impossible, for people to recognize faces and ultimately it leads to blindness. While there is no cure for macular degeneration, people can maintain and even improve their vision with the use of a drug called Lucentis.”

Mr. Wilson is now the NDP government’s deputy house leader, which last month decided against funding Lucentis, the only provincial government to do so and contrary to the recommendation of the Common Drug Review, of which Nova Scotia is a participant, which evaluates new drugs for both their medical and economic effectiveness. While Lucentis does add costs to the provincial drug budget, its effect in preventing vision loss saves far more in the health and social services costs of caring for those who can no longer see effectively, not to mention the immense personal costs of vision loss on those with the disease and their families.

The CCB is calling on all concerned Nova Scotians to protest this hypocrisy and to demand equal treatment to other Canadians for Nova Scotians with AMD by calling or sending an e-mail to the premier, the minister of health and deputy house leader David Wilson. **Please visit CCB website to obtain more information, take action and make a difference: www.ccbnational.net .**

Lucentis is the first and only AMD treatment that has been shown not only to stop vision loss in AMD, but also to reverse vision loss. Approved for use in Canada in 2007, Lucentis is the brand name for the drug ranibizumab, which is delivered by injection to the eye every four to six weeks. It has been shown to prevent further vision loss in 95% of people with wet AMD and reverse vision loss for 40% of those treated. The Common Drug Review recommended all Canadian public drug plans reimburse Lucentis, based on its medical and economic value, in a recommendation in March 2008, more than two years ago. Nova Scotia is now the only province not to implement that recommendation.

About AMD

Nearly 300,000 Canadians suffer from wet AMD. It is anticipated that 20,000 new cases of wet AMD will be diagnosed in Canada this year alone, a number expected to double within the next 25 years. AMD is a progressive disease that causes rapid and severe central vision loss in a matter of a few weeks to months and can severely compromise a person's ability to function independently. AMD can lead to vision loss and blindness. Wet AMD is responsible for 90% of vision loss associated with AMD.

About The Canadian Council of the Blind

The Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB) was founded in 1944 by blind war veterans and graduates from schools of the blind. All officers and directors are blind or visually impaired which gives a unique sensitivity to the needs of the blind community. The CCB is a registered charity pursuant to the provisions of the Income Tax Act (Canada). The CCB has over 65 chapters across Canada and is the largest membership based organization for the blind. Recently, under changes to its new bylaws, the CCB encourages the sighted community to become members to assist in its mission to address the issues of blindness and visual impairment which affect many families in Canada. The CCB deals with the ongoing effects of blindness with specific programs to encourage active participation in local communities, education, sports and recreation and employment. The national office is located in Ottawa, Ontario. The CCB is the "Voice of the Blind(R)" in Canada. More info at: www.ccbnational.net.

-30-

For further information, contact:

Louise Gillis, Vice-President
Canadian Council of the Blind
Nova Scotia Division
ccb@ccbnational.net
Attention of Louise

Bob Butler
Ampersand Communications
Ph: 902.240.2250
E: ampersand@eastlink.ca