



## PRESS RELEASE

### Quebec must quickly acquire the tools to address multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS)

Montreal, August 23, 2022 - The Confédération des organismes de personnes handicapées du Québec (COPHAN) and the Association pour la santé environnementale du Québec-Environmental Health Association of Québec (ASEQ-EHAQ) are calling on the Government of Quebec to take immediate action to prevent any harm to those diagnosed with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS). Many Quebecers experiencing MCS are currently left to fend for themselves with no support or assistance. Action is urgently needed on this issue that has been dragging on for over a decade.

#### Multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS)

Multiple chemical sensitivity is a [medical condition and a disability protected under the Canadian Human Rights Act](#). In Canada, 1,130,800 people aged 12 and over are diagnosed with MCS; 72% are women and approximately 50% are over 55 years of age. The prevalence is increasing and statistics show that 251,000 people have been diagnosed in Quebec alone (Statistics Canada, CCHS, 2020).

MCS is caused by **sensitization** to a variety of chemicals found in commonly used products, including fragrances and scented products used for a variety of applications, including personal use, laundry, cleaning, maintenance, and renovations. Exposures can trigger symptoms, which can be multiple and manifest in several body systems, including the brain. The resulting disability worsens with repeated exposure. Nearly 41% of people with MCS are unemployed because of their disability, and 65% of these people have an income of less than \$20,000 (Statistics Canada, CCHS 2015-2016).

#### Quebec not equipped to address MCS

Quebec does not have any expertise on this health condition, nor does it have measures to accommodate and provide accessibility to this disabled population. In 2011, Dr. Bolduc, Minister of Health and Social Services, informed the House Leader that he would mandate the National Institute of Public Health to produce a document on MCS in order to find out what is being done or exists in other provinces or countries.

ASEQ-EHAQ immediately raised serious concerns about this mandate due to a lack of expertise in MCS in Quebec. Despite several written commitments by the MSSS to involve and consult with the ASEQ-EHAQ and experts on the health condition, none of this materialized. The report published on June 29, 2021 shows that no MCS experts were included at any stage and not even in the review process. Multiple articles on MCS were left out as well. The results of the report are flawed for all of these reasons. The findings of the INSPQ report suggest that MCS is caused by anxiety and not by chemical exposures, because of flawed scientific methodology and it is offensive and stigmatizing to the people experiencing this disability.

### **A botched report to be withdrawn without delay**

The INSPQ report must be withdrawn to prevent any harm to those diagnosed with MCS. In order to prevent harm to those affected, it is requested, without further delay:

1. That the report be removed from the INSPQ website immediately;
2. That an independent committee which includes experts and people with lived experience in MCS be set up to verify the value and accuracy of all aspects of the report, including the delays that have been caused, which delay the provision of assistance (housing, scent control in public places and health care, etc.);
3. That the Minister of Health provide a further mandate to an independent task force of health status experts and people with lived experience (a CIHR requirement for research) to prepare a report on best practices and patient-centred care;
4. Review the public policies related to the good management of MCS (healthy environment without perfumes, and where only the least toxic solutions are used);
5. Promote and build healthy, affordable housing for people with MCS.

The Ministry of Health must avoid further delays in the actions required in this matter. It is necessary to reduce the prejudices and remove all bureaucratic barriers to disabilities in the MCS community now and, above all, to work together to achieve accessibility.

We need a Quebec that promotes the use of the least toxic solutions for all applications and uses, and fragrance-free policies, especially for health care and essential services.

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## Additional Information and References

- Statistics Canada (2015-2016) Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), share file
- Statistics Canada (2020) Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), share file
- The case for making health-care in Québec fragrance-free: <https://aseq-ehaq.ca/ressources/fragrances/>
- Canadian Statistics: <https://aseq-ehaq.ca/en/environmental-sensitivities/statistics/>
- Canadian Human Rights Commission, Policy: <https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/en/resources/publications/policy-environmental-sensitivities>
- Québec Human Rights Commission to ASEQ-EHAQ: <https://aseq-ehaq.ca/pdf/Letter-from-the-Human-Rights-Commission-of-Quebec.pdf>
- Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Ontario – Task Force on Environmental Health: <https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/environmentalhealth/default.aspx>
- Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Ontario – Ministry Reports: [https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/environmental\\_health\\_2018/default.aspx](https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/environmental_health_2018/default.aspx)
- [Care Now: An Action Plan to Improve Care for People with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome \(ME/CFS\), Fibromyalgia \(FM\) and Environmental Sensitivities/Multiple Chemical Sensitivity \(ES/MCS\)](https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/environmental_health_2018/task_force_on_environmental_health_report_2018.pdf)  
144 pages | format in PDF  
[https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/environmental\\_health\\_2018/task\\_force\\_on\\_environmental\\_health\\_report\\_2018.pdf](https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/environmental_health_2018/task_force_on_environmental_health_report_2018.pdf)
- Multiple Chemical Sensitivity: Literature Review and the State of the Science. May 6, 2021. Prepared for Alberta Health: <https://aseq->

[ehaq.ca/pdf/Alberta\\_health-multiple-chemical-sensitivity-literature-review-state-of-science-2021.pdf](http://ehaq.ca/pdf/Alberta_health-multiple-chemical-sensitivity-literature-review-state-of-science-2021.pdf)

- Important studies on MCS: <https://aseq-ehaq.ca/en/research-on-mcs/>