

Urgent call for multiple chemical sensitivity in Quebec

*Because of the government's inaction: two young women with disabilities
request medical assistance in dying.*

Quebec City, June 3, 2024 - The Confédération des organismes des personnes handicapées du Québec (COPHAN), in collaboration with the Comité d'action des personnes vivant des situations de handicap (CAPVISH) and the Association pour la santé environnementale du Québec – Environmental Health Association of Québec (ASEQ-EHAQ), today expressed their deep disappointment at the Quebec government's continued inaction and non-recognition of multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS) as a physiological medical condition.

This dramatic situation prompted two young women from Quebec City to request medical assistance in dying, as they could no longer bear the isolation and suffering associated with a medical condition often confused with mental health.

The prevalence of MCS is increasing (CCHS, Statistics Canada, 2000-2020) and while some other Canadian provinces offer appropriate support, and many countries around the world have already recognized and offered support for this medical condition, Quebec is lagging behind, leaving over 250,000 citizens (CCHS, Statistics Canada, 2020) to suffer without any appropriate services or support. People with MCS face significant barriers in their daily lives, impacting access to employment, healthcare, and the community.

"We at ASEQ-EHAQ work tirelessly through education and awareness for a healthy environment and justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility of the disability of MCS. Our goal is to promote appropriate management of this disability in the field of health and social services. However, the Quebec government's slowness to act in this area is alarming and unacceptable, especially given the growing prevalence of this condition," said Michel Gaudet, Vice-President and Executive Director of ASEQ-EHAQ.

The recent requests for medical assistance in dying by two young women from Quebec City underscore the urgency of this situation. These women, unable to continue living in unbearable conditions without recognition or adequate support, have been driven to this extreme decision. It highlights the failure of the system to meet their basic needs.

"We believe that the government must ensure accessibility to this disability and remove barriers to inclusion," stresses Paul Lupien, President of COPHAN.

Three demands are proposed to the government:

- Set up appropriate training programs for health and social sector professionals, in consultation with experts and lived experience in the field of environmental health, to ensure better understanding and management of multiple chemical sensitivity.
- Develop inclusive and accessible health services and infrastructures to meet the specific needs of people with multiple chemical sensitivity.
- Provide appropriate and accessible social housing and allocate financial resources to help people with MCS adapt their environment to their disability and cover medical expenses not covered by current insurance schemes.

"We call on the Quebec government to break out of its stasis and take decisive action to improve the lives of people living with multiple chemical sensitivity. It's time to act to guarantee their right to health and well-being. Inaction is no longer an option, and lives are at stake," concluded Dominique Salgado, Executive Director of CAPVISH.

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About COPHAN :

The Confédération des organismes de personnes handicapées du Québec, COPHAN, is the largest French-language multi-disability confederation in North America. With more than 50 affiliated organizations, COPHAN directly

or indirectly defends the rights of over 1 million people with disabilities in Quebec.

About CAPVISH:

For over 45 years, the Comité d'action des personnes vivant des situations de handicap (CAPVISH) has been campaigning for an inclusive society and is dedicated to defending the rights of people with disabilities.

About ASEQ-EHAQ :

The Association pour la santé environnementale du Québec (ASEQ-EHAQ) is dedicated to raising awareness and supporting people with multiple chemical sensitivity, working for a healthy environment that respects the needs of all.