

## Effective Advocacy with Limited Energy: Navigating through the Healthcare System

Living with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) often means managing complex health needs in a world that doesn't always understand or accommodate them. For many, accessing healthcare becomes a challenge in itself - whether it's explaining your condition to medical professionals, avoiding chemical exposures in clinical settings, or simply being taken seriously. The process can be physically and emotionally exhausting.

The good news? You're not alone in this. You don't need to be an expert in health policy to start advocating for safer, more respectful care. Our website features a range of tools and resources specifically designed to support individuals with MCS as they navigate the healthcare system.

This is the third article in our advocacy series. The first article introduced the toolkit available on the ASEQ-EHAQ website, and the second explored legal support for people with MCS. In this article, we'll turn our attention to how you can use available resources to access health care that respects your condition, your safety, and your voice.

### Diagnosis, Treatment, and Resources

The "Diagnosis, Treatment and Resources" section of the ASEQ-EHAQ website offers a comprehensive guide for individuals living with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), their families, and health professionals. It begins with an in-depth explanation of what MCS is—a chronic, often painful condition triggered by low-level exposures to chemicals and environmental agents that are typically tolerated by the general population. Visitors will find detailed lists of potential triggers, including everyday items like scented products, cleaning supplies, building materials, and workplace chemicals. The site also outlines a wide range of symptoms affecting multiple body systems, including neurological and respiratory issues, as well as gastrointestinal and cardiovascular reactions.

To help individuals seeking a diagnosis, this section introduces recognized diagnostic tools such as the CH2OPD2 exposure history and the Quick Environmental Exposure

and Sensitivity Inventory (QEESI). It also explains the accepted Consensus Statement used to identify MCS, which is used for diagnostic and research purposes, and remains unrefuted. For those with MCS, the site offers practical guidance on treatment strategies that focus on trigger avoidance, reducing toxic load, addressing nutritional deficiencies, and creating safer environments, both at home and in healthcare settings.

This section also provides accommodation request templates to help communicate with medical offices.

## Learn from Experts

In addition to the resources found under the “Diagnosis, Treatment and Resources” section, the website also features valuable information in the Empowering Community and Removal of Barriers (ECRoB) project section. Within this area, there is a dedicated “Medical” subsection that focuses specifically on the medical aspects of Multiple Chemical Sensitivity.

This section of the site features video recordings from last year’s MCS-focused events, where experts discussed key topics related to diagnosis, treatment, and medical care for individuals living with MCS. You’ll also find recordings of the Q&A sessions, where attendees asked important questions and received thoughtful responses from health professionals and researchers.

These recordings offer an excellent opportunity to deepen your understanding of MCS, hear from medical experts, and explore practical approaches to care, all from the comfort of your home.

The site offers guidance for patients and healthcare providers on creating and maintaining scent-free spaces, including downloadable tools and policies that can be shared with clinics and hospitals. For patients who are highly sensitive, having a designated “safe room” can make all the difference during appointments. These strategies not only protect health but also help open the door to essential care.

To support conversations with health care professionals, this section also includes diagnostic tools such as the Consensus Criteria, BREESI, and QEESI, which can help guide practitioners in recognizing and understanding MCS, even in the absence of biological markers. Patients will also find templates for support letters that they can ask



their doctor to complete for workplace, housing, or other accommodations. Self-management is key to reducing stress and emergency visits. The website offers tracking tools, patient education resources such as the SEEDS of Health, and hospital guidelines that staff can use to improve care. With these tools in hand, patients and their allies can feel more confident in navigating medical systems that may not yet fully understand the complexities of MCS.

## Fragrance-Free Health Care

The website also features a resources tab with information specifically on fragrance-free healthcare. In this section, you will find an overview of why fragrance-free policies are essential in health-care settings to protect vulnerable populations from harmful exposures. It also highlights successful examples from across Canada and encourages Québec facilities to adopt similar measures to ensure safe, inclusive, and scent-free environments for all.

## ASEQ-EHAQ

You don't have to face these challenges alone. ASEQ-EHAQ offers both online and phone-based support to help you navigate the healthcare system with confidence. Whether you need help drafting letters, preparing for appointments, or simply want to talk through your options, our team is here for you. We also provide ready-to-use educational materials that you can share with health care providers, employers, or landlords, so you don't have to start from square one each time you explain MCS.

Keep an eye out for future articles in this series, where we'll continue highlighting tools and resources on our website designed to support you and those you care about.