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Summary

Civil Society Panel Discussion

The panel discussion at the *Resilience International Conference on MCS* convened national leaders in disability rights, public health, environmental advocacy, and community services to explore how Canada can build a more inclusive and accessible society for people living with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS). Moderated by Robert Lattanzio, the conversation featured: Rohini Peris and Michel Gaudet of the Environmental Health Association of Canada and the Environmental Health Association of Québec; Maureen Haan, President & CEO, Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work; Bill Adair, Executive Director, Spinal Cord Injury Canada; Melanie Langille, President & CEO, NB Lung; Freda Uwa, National Executive Director, Independent Living Canada; Jamie McCleary, Autism Canada; and Shelley Petit, President, New Brunswick Coalition of Persons with Disabilities.

Rohini Peris opened the discussion by emphasizing that MCS is not merely a medical issue—it is a human rights issue. She stressed the profound isolation and inaccessibility that people with MCS face in everyday environments, including healthcare facilities, workplaces, and public buildings. Michel Gaudet reinforced this point by drawing attention to the lack of political will and systemic recognition, calling for a Canada-wide approach that goes beyond fragmented provincial responses.

Maureen Haan spoke from an employment lens, highlighting how chemical exposures in work environments systematically exclude people with MCS. She called for better education among employers, the development of inclusive hiring practices, and federally supported policies for scent-free workplaces. Similarly, Bill Adair emphasized the role of national organizations in creating systemic solutions, advocating for more substantial policy alignment between the disability and health sectors to ensure that people with MCS are not left behind.

Melanie Langille focused on the need to reframe air quality as a fundamental accessibility issue. As a representative from NB Lung, she emphasized how improving indoor air benefits not only people with MCS but also individuals with asthma, respiratory illnesses, and chronic conditions. She urged public health authorities to take a more active role in driving preventative measures through policy and public education.

Freda Uwa emphasized that equity and accessibility must extend beyond physical accommodations to include environmental health considerations. She called for intersectional, community-led approaches that reflect the experiences of racialized and economically marginalized people living with MCS and disabilities. Jamie McCleary added that many people with autism also live with sensory and chemical sensitivities, and that shared advocacy can amplify impact across disability communities.

Shelley Petit provided a passionate account of advocacy in New Brunswick, describing how MCS has often been dismissed by policymakers due to its invisibility. She emphasized that people with MCS are not just constituents—they are experts by experience—and their insights must be centered in the design of policies and programs.

Throughout the discussion, panellists converged on several critical priorities: the need for federally coordinated scent-free and lowest-emission policies, cross-disability collaboration, community-based education, and meaningful inclusion of people with MCS in policy development. The conversation highlighted the urgency of integrating environmental health into the broader accessibility framework. It demonstrated that achieving equity for people with MCS will benefit all Canadians by creating cleaner, healthier, and more inclusive environments.