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Environmental Health Association of Québec

Summary

Prevalence of MCS

Rohini Peris
President & CEO, the Environmental Health Association of Canada and the Environmental Health Association of Québec

The presentation of Rohini Peris on the national prevalence and demographics of Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) highlighted the scope and severity of the issue in Canada and internationally, calling attention to the systemic gaps that prevent individuals with MCS from living safely and with dignity. Rohini Peris, the President of the Environmental Health Association of Canada and the Environmental Health Association of Québec, has long advocated for achieving equity and accessibility for all affected by MCS. She began by emphasizing that prevalence data is not just about numbers—it is a matter of justice and recognition. MCS remains underdiagnosed and misunderstood, often marginalized within medical and policy frameworks. Drawing on research from North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia, she reported that between 9% and 16% of the general population self-identify as chemically sensitive, while only 0.5% to 4% have received a formal diagnosis. This significant gap reflects not only diagnostic failure but also the broader invisibility of this disability in public health systems.

Rohini Peris presented data showing that individuals with MCS face considerable disadvantages compared to the general population. They are more likely to experience functional limitations in daily activities, lower levels of job and food security, and significantly reduced satisfaction with life, housing, and overall well-being. Many report chronic stress related to running out of food or affording basic necessities—issues directly linked to employment instability and inaccessible healthcare. She emphasized that the lack of fragrance-free and low-emission environments further restricts their ability to access workspaces, housing, and public services safely. These intersecting disparities underscore the need for policy frameworks that acknowledge the lived realities of individuals with MCS.

In closing, Rohini Peris underscored that the growing prevalence of MCS is not just a trend—it is a call to action. She insisted that recognition must translate into responsibility, and that data must be used to drive equitable policy. Ensuring inclusion and protection for people with MCS means acknowledging their condition as an environmental disability and addressing it with the same urgency applied to other accessibility and health equity issues. Her message was clear: no one should be left behind, and systemic change must begin with evidence, compassion, and accountability.