

The Resilience 2026 panel brought together a multi-sector group of leaders from disability, health, law, and community organizations across Canada to address systemic barriers, reform opportunities, and pathways to inclusive practices around Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS).

Moderating the session, Rohini Peris established a framework for how lived experience must inform the legal and civil actions of leading advocacy groups. Powerful accounts from panellists with lived experience highlighted the profound isolation and physical danger faced by individuals with MCS. Common institutional protocols, such as the ubiquitous use of scented hand sanitizers and chemical cleaning agents, effectively lock patients out of essential healthcare, housing, transit, and education. Panellists shared devastating instances of societal hostility, institutional disbelief, and direct retaliation when requesting simple accommodations like fragrance-free environments or functioning automatic door-opening devices. Conversely, the discussion also showed that safe, dignified care is achievable when organizations proactively adapt, as illustrated by medical practices that use early-morning scheduling, isolated rooms with dedicated air purifiers, and customized medical supplies to protect vulnerable patients.

From a legal and structural perspective, the panel examined how existing human rights frameworks frequently fail the MCS community. Navigating recourse through human rights tribunals often introduces additional trauma, as the legal system can treat the necessary time extensions and specific environmental needs of disabled applicants with administrative annoyance, functionally stripping them of their human rights. Legal advocates emphasized the urgent need to move past reactive, poorly enforced scent policies and instead implement mandatory, legally binding accessibility standards.

Civil society leaders from prominent national networks, including Indigenous, independent living, and rehabilitation coalitions, unified around the principle that chemical barriers are a critical public health crisis. The panel concluded that true systemic reform requires cross-sector solidarity, urging organizations to break down silos and collectively leverage lived experience, legal advocacy, and environmental research to pressure corporate and government bodies to create a toxic-free, accessible world for everyone.

The panel discussion serves as a vital catalyst for law reform by illustrating that voluntary, localized scent policies fail to protect public safety. Witnessing testimonies of severe medical emergencies, the panel underscores the urgent need to codify fragrance-free policies as strict operational mandates across all federally regulated spaces, public institutions, and transit networks. To permanently shift the burden of safety away from the individual, these legal reforms must integrate strict indoor environmental quality standards, including material regulations, ventilation, and air filtration mandates, directly into federal accessibility legislation.

Furthermore, this legal evolution must guarantee formalized, legally mandated accommodation pathways for individuals with MCS across workplaces, healthcare, housing, and education. The panel highlighted the devastating consequences of relying on discretionary goodwill, sharing accounts of students forced out of college with massive debt and terminal cancer patients relying on makeshift clean-air rooms. To counter the severe social stigma and institutional

disbelief reported by panellists, legal frameworks must elevate public awareness by formally recognizing chemical barriers as equivalent to physical barriers, mandating that air quality be treated with the same urgency as wheelchair ramps.

Advancing disability rights requires building evidence-informed environmental health policies that draw directly from environmental medicine and civil society research. Crucially, this reform must extend into the justice system itself. Currently, human rights tribunals frequently exhibit bureaucratic impatience and dismissiveness when applicants request procedural adjustments, such as extensions of time to manage debilitating flare-ups. Law reform must explicitly restructure court and tribunal operations to ensure that access to justice remains equitable, accessible, and safe.