

Rohini Peris, CEO of the Environmental Health Association of Québec, presented a data-driven analysis of Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) at the Resilience 2026 conference. She began by framing MCS as a critical Canadian public health and human rights issue. Utilizing two decades of Canadian Community Health Survey, Statistics Canada, data, Peris demonstrated that the diagnosed prevalence of MCS nearly doubled between 2000 and 2020, now affecting over 1.13 million people, or roughly 1 in 34 Canadians. The demographic data shows a strong female majority at 72 percent and significant regional variation, with Nova Scotia reaching a 7 percent prevalence rate by 2020.

The presentation highlighted the Accessible Air in the Built Environment study, which analyzed indoor air quality across 34 office environments. The findings provided empirical proof that scent-free policies are highly effective, showing that total Volatile Organic Compound (TVOC) levels were up to 70 percent lower in workplaces with active policies. Additionally, concentrations of hazardous toxins like benzene, formaldehyde, and toluene were drastically reduced in environments which effectively enforced the policy. The research also uncovered a transparency gap, noting that many products marketed as eco-friendly still emitted unlisted hazardous chemicals such as acetone and limonene.

Ms. Peris linked these air quality metrics to clinical outcomes, noting that high chemical loads correlate with debilitating symptoms including cognitive impairment, respiratory distress, and migraines. Notably, 50 percent of those with MCS manage co-occurring conditions like asthma or dermatitis. Such comorbidities contribute to an increasing physiological vulnerability. Ultimately, the presentation positioned accessible air as a legal mandate under the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Accessible Canada Act. Ms. Peris argued for a systemic shift where the responsibility for safety moves from the individual to the institution, advocating for mandatory source control and chemical transparency to meet Canada's goal of a barrier-free society by 2040.

References

Robins S, Molot J, Peris R. Prevalence of Multiple Chemical Sensitivity in Canada Between 2000 and 2020. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2026 Feb 13;23(2):236. doi: 10.3390/ijerph23020236. PMID: 41752318; PMCID: PMC12940565.