
ARTHRITIS CARE ON VERGE OF NEW ERA

Unprecedented Summit aims to change Canada's approach to prevention and treatment

OTTAWA (September 12, 2005) – As Canada marks Arthritis Month in September, the country's arthritis community is hopeful this will be the last such commemoration without clear national standards for arthritis prevention and care.

An unprecedented Summit is on track for November 1-3 in Ottawa, to establish definitive standards for dealing with the disease. The **Summit on Standards for Arthritis Prevention and Care** will bring together a wide cross-section of arthritis stakeholders – including a significant number of people with arthritis – to set out a consistent, practical plan of action.

“More than four million Canadians have arthritis, and the number continues to grow, yet there is no common approach at any level,” said Cheryl Koehn, a 15-year survivor of rheumatoid arthritis and a patient advocate who is one of four co-chairs for the Summit. “We are bringing together the most knowledgeable people – medical and non-medical – to determine the standards that need to be in place to ensure that all Canadians get both the information and care they need in a timely, effective way.”

Ultimately, government will be responsible for implementing the standards, and preparations for the Summit have included extensive interaction with government at the federal and provincial/territorial levels. The Hon. Dr. Carolyn Bennett, Canada's Minister of State (Public Health), has agreed to address the delegates. The Office of Prime Minister Paul Martin and several provincial/territorial Premiers have also expressed interest in the Summit and its outcomes.

“Government needs to be at the table, and we believe government officials will listen – as long as the standards make sense. That's why we are striving to ensure that the standards coming out of the Summit are reasonable and do-able,” said Summit co-chair Dr. Dianne Mosher.

Arthritis is one of the three most common chronic diseases in the country. About 100,000 Canadians each year are diagnosed with arthritis, and in the next 20 years the number of Canadians with the disease is projected to reach six million. Each year, Canadians make nearly nine million physician visits for arthritis and related conditions.

To focus attention on standards for preventing and treating arthritis, approximately 250 participants from across the country will take part in the Summit. Delegates will be comprised of formal and informal care givers, health care providers, government (federal and provincial/territorial) representatives, arthritis researchers and clinicians, voluntary associations, the pharmaceutical industry, and people with arthritis.

The Summit will be the culmination of **Rock This Joint: Bringing Together Arthritis Knowledge and Action**, which will involve eight days of high-level arthritis meetings in Ottawa. In addition to the Summit, “Rock This Joint” includes the Bone and Joint Decade World Network Conference (October 27-29) and the Canadian Arthritis Network's 5th Annual Scientific Conference (October 29-31).

“Rock This Joint” is an initiative of the Alliance for the Canadian Arthritis Program (ACAP). ACAP was formed two years ago, when the organizations working to help people with arthritis live better lives joined together. More than 30 organizations are involved, and while each group continues its own work, ACAP provides a central focus for all arthritis-related initiatives.

For additional information, please visit the ACAP website at arthritisalliance.com.

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