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**MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND LONG-TERM CARE LAUNCHES TASK FORCE
TO ADDRESS 'RECOGNITION AND CARE' OF ONTARIANS WITH
ENVIRONMENTAL AND CHEMICAL SENSITIVITIES, MYALGIC ENCEPHALOMYELITIS/CHRONIC
FATIGUE SYNDROME AND FIBROMYALGIA**

May 26, 2016

TORONTO, Queen's Park—In a major new initiative for people who live with chronic, environmentally-linked illnesses, on May 10, 2016 MPP Indira Naidoo-Harris, Parliamentary Assistant to Eric Hoskins, Minister of Health and Long Term Care, announced that the Ontario government is forming a **Task Force for Environmental Health**.

The announcement was made in a reception room at Queen's Park as the **Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Association of Ontario (MEAO)**; **successfully held its International Awareness Day** to raise consciousness about the plight of people living with Environmental Sensitivities, also known as Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (ES/MCS), Myalgic Encephalomyelitis, also known as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS) and Fibromyalgia (FM).

Though these often overlapping illnesses are widespread, affecting about five percent of Ontario's population, awareness is frequently poor, even among medical professionals, and care is absent. **The Task Force will raise awareness of the illnesses and recommend measures to improve the care available to patients. The Task Force will also work to address existing major gaps in knowledge and engage the community broadly.**

The announcement came after eight years of advocacy by patients and health care providers, including MEAO and the Association of Ontario Health Centres (AOHC). This process resulted in a package of [ground-breaking reports and a business case proposal for a network of care and support](#) that was submitted to Ontario's Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) in late 2013. The basic objectives of these reports were to achieve **recognition, inclusion and equity** for Ontarians with these conditions.

The Task Force for Environmental Health will work across government ministries, Naidoo-Harris noted. It is extremely fortunate to **be chaired by Dr. Howard Hu, Dean of the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto**, who is a physician-scientist and a distinguished specialist in environmental medicine. Dr. Hu, when introducing himself to the audience referred to the **lack of care and recognition for these illnesses as a human rights issue.**

Membership of the Task Force will be announced shortly. It will be made up of 15 people in total, including key stakeholders such as **patient groups, MOHLTC officials, environmental health researchers, physicians and public health professionals**. Support for the Task Force crosses partisan lines and has been based on the OCEEH [business case proposal](#).

“Chemical injury and chemical sensitivity affect hundreds of thousands of Ontarians who have been without care for decades,” said John Doherty, co-chair of the project for a Centre of Excellence in Environmental HEALTH. “At last, we’re moving in the right direction.”

Denise Magi, vice-president of MEAO noted that last year, a US Centers for Disease Control affiliate, the Institute of Medicine, released a major report confirming the existence and debilitating nature of ME/CFS. “I am so glad that Ontario is finally stepping up to increase recognition and provide help to patients who face both lack of care and discrimination.”

MEAO offers its appreciation to the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and the MPPs of all three of Ontario’s political parties who have favourably supported this cause. Thank you!

To arrange an interview with a representative from the associations involved, please contact:

Denise Magi – Vice-President - MEAO info@meao.ca

John Doherty – co-chair Campaign for the Ontario Centre of Excellence in Environmental Health
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A website for the Task Force on Environmental Health will go live soon. In the meantime, the email address of the task force is tfeh@ontario.ca

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