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Recommendations for the Next Ontario Budget

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The National ME/FM Action Network is a registered charity serving Canadians with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME), Fibromyalgia (FM) or both. These are complex disabling medical conditions that bring with them high degrees of disability, unemployment, poverty, food insecurity and social isolation.

Over 380,000 Ontarians had a diagnosis of Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (often referred to as chronic fatigue syndrome) and/or Fibromyalgia in 2015/16. There are very few services available – including health, social or employment supports. This lack of services has serious consequences not only for Ontarians with these conditions and their families but also for all Ontarians.

While services are hard to find, a bright light is the Environmental Health Clinic serving people with ME, FM and Environmental Sensitivities (ES) in Ontario. Before they arrive at the clinic, patients have often been on fruitless and lengthy searches for care, as very few doctors know how to diagnose or to treat these illnesses. The clinic was established in 1996 by the government of Ontario and, although extremely small and with a lengthy waiting list, it is the centre of expertise for these illnesses in the Province. Its dedicated group of doctors has delved deeply into issues around ME, FM and ES.

The Ontario Minister of Health asked a Task Force to look at health care services for Ontarians with ME, FM and/or ES. The task force's report was submitted in December 2018.

Public Health Ontario was then asked to develop an implementation plan. This work was put on hold because of the pandemic. This is very unfortunate. We are seeing the emergence of COVID-19 "long-haulers", people who have officially 'recovered' from COVID-19 but are experiencing continuing symptoms. Many of them could be in the early stages of ME or FM, as happened following other viral illnesses including post-SARS. They too could benefit from knowledgeable care.

Our recommendations for the budget:

- provide immediate funding for Public Health Ontario to complete the plan for implementation of the task force's report.
- invest in front line health care by providing immediate ongoing funding to the Environmental Health Clinic so that they can increase services, develop tools for other health professionals and assist in the development of the Centre of Excellence envisaged in the task force's report.
- provide immediate funding to the Ministry of Health for disease surveillance related to these illnesses, including post-Covid -19.
- anticipate ongoing funding for the Ministry of Health to support ongoing care.

Ontario will benefit from the investments. ME and FM are serious health issues affecting many people in Ontario.