

**16<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly**

**Third Session  
First Sitting  
October 22 - 24, 2008**

**OCT 22, 2008**

**Extended Health Benefits for Constituents with Multiple Sclerosis**

**Mr. Ramsay:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to speak about the difficulties a constituent is encountering in dealing with Health and Social Services. My constituent has multiple sclerosis, or MS, as it is commonly referred to.

MS attacks the covering of the brain, causing inflammation and scarring. When this happens, the usual flow of nerve impulses along nerve fibres is interrupted or distorted. MS can be a very debilitating and progressive disease. Symptoms can include extreme fatigue, loss of balance, problems with coordination, stiffness of muscles, speech problems, bladder and bowel problems, short-term memory loss and partial or complete paralysis.

Mr. Speaker, anyone living with MS can experience some or all of these symptoms. I was very concerned when my constituent contacted me at the beginning of this month to tell me that she had been turned down by Extended Health Benefits for a WalkAide, which was duly prescribed by a neurologist.

The WalkAide is a functional electrical stimulation device that allows a person who has MS to walk without dragging their feet. When my constituent contacted health benefits, she was told that the WalkAide was a luxury that was not covered by extended health benefits.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to know if the Minister of Health and Social Services also thinks that walking should be considered a luxury in our territory. I had contacted the Minister's office with my concerns, and it took them close to three weeks to write me back, saying my constituent should phone the deputy minister.

I am completely at a loss as to why it took three weeks to say we will get her a cane or a wheelchair, and she can phone the deputy minister so he can assign staff to review her file so she could be provided with financial support equivalent to what she would have been eligible for which, would be a cane or a wheelchair. This is completely unacceptable.

In Alberta these devices are helping those suffering with MS, and they are being distributed for free to help people. Why is this product not on the list in the Northwest Territories? I thought we were in the business of helping our residents, Mr. Speaker. My constituent wants to walk with dignity, not with a cane and certainly not be in a wheelchair, though she had to purchase this device herself.

Why would the government not cover such a device? At \$4500 it would be a small price to pay for a person's quality of life. People pay taxes their entire life, and when they encounter a serious health issue like MS, the government should be there for them. In this case they weren't, and that's a shame.