



National  
Multiple Sclerosis  
Society

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**The Appropriations Committee  
Public Hearing - February 18, 2009  
Testimony on  
Governor Rell's Proposed Budget for the Department of Social Services  
and Human Services Programs**

Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, Senator Hartley, Representative Bartlett, Representative Heinrich, Representative Roldan, Senator Debicella, Representative Miner, and Distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee and the Human Services Subcommittee,

My name is Susan Raimondo and I am the Senior Director of Advocacy and Programs for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Connecticut Chapter. I am also the family care giver representative to the CT Long Term Care Advisory Council and I serve on the Money Follows the Person Steering Committee. I have been involved in advocacy, providing services and in policy development assisting elders and persons with disabilities for over 25 years in our state.

First, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Connecticut Chapter would like to thank Governor Rell for including funding for the Connecticut Home Care Program for the Disabled in her budget. This program is the only option for these younger individuals who are living with degenerative neurological diseases and who are at high risk of institutionalization. We are asking that the Appropriations Committee include the funding for this essential program. Tonight you will hear from individuals living with MS who use the program. If this program is not included, the 41 individuals currently on the program will lose their home care and have to be inappropriately institutionalized. We know that the program is saving the state money. The average monthly cost of home care for individuals on the program is \$1,512, compared to a cost of \$5,690 if the individual were to be on Medicaid and living in a nursing home. SAVINGS: \$4,178 per person per month or a total of state \$2,055,576 each year!

The proposed cuts in health care services to Connecticut's most vulnerable individuals are very distressing. Individuals with multiple sclerosis will be impacted at all levels of the cuts.

Specific areas of concern include:

1. Elimination of dental services for adults on Medicaid, SAGA, and HUSKY. The value of dental care and the importance of access is crucial for prevention of many health problems that go beyond oral care. Many medications that individuals with MS take for symptom management cause changes in dental health. For example medications that are used to help bladder control and those that help depression all cause dry mouth. When a person is not able to produce enough saliva, they are at greater risk of tooth decay

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and need more frequent dental care. Almost 60% of people with MS have bladder problems and over 31% live with severe depression.

Swallowing problems effect over 22% of people with MS and for these individuals, access to dental care is essential for good nutrition and also for prevention of infections like aspiration pneumonia.

2. Access to Medications for individuals on Medicaid/ConnPACE/SAGA and HUSKY. The proposals to require prior authorization for expensive and non-formulary medications is very concerning. Many medications used in the management of MS are being used off label. For example amantadine is an antiviral medication but is used for MS fatigue. We also may use oral chemotherapeutic medications to help suppress the immune system to reduce frequency of attacks.

3. Adding psychiatric medications may cause individuals to be unable to obtain their needed medications. In the case of MS, many individuals are using a variety of medications to maintain function. In people with MS, Severe depression can be a life-threatening condition because it may include suicidal feelings. One study found that the risk of suicide was 7.5 times higher among persons with MS than the general population.

4. Many of the medications that help keep people with MS out of the hospital are expensive. The disease modifying agents and also some symptom management medications are expensive. You will hear testimony from our members about their experiences. Please maximize the opportunities for helping individuals to access all medications including those not on formularies.

Other items of concern related to ConnPACE and dually eligible individuals include the proposed changes to the "wrap around" services and ability for people to get non-formulary items.

Thank you for your attention and support.