

Backgrounder for Alberta Election Campaign – 2019

Multiple Myeloma: Our Disease

Multiple myeloma, commonly referred to as myeloma, is a cancer of the plasma cells found in the bone marrow. A plasma cell is a type of immune cell that produces antibodies to fight infection. Because plasma cells are found in the blood, myeloma is also referred to as a hematologic or blood cancer.

Myeloma, is an incurable cancer, the causes of which remain unknown.

It is a complex disease, characterized by cycles of disease control and relapse, and in most cases, treatment will eventually lose its effect. Although there is yet no cure, newly available drugs are helping to make the disease more treatable. Many patients are able to lead full lives for many years after diagnosis. However, increased research and access to emerging treatments remain essential for improving the prognosis and outlook for myeloma patients. Several life-changing treatments have been approved by Health Canada in recent years, however even the best treatments are irrelevant if patients do not have access to them; it truly is the difference between life and death.

Myeloma Canada: Our Patient Organization

Myeloma Canada is a non-profit, charitable organization created by, and for, Canadians living with multiple myeloma. Exclusively devoted to the Canadian myeloma community, the organisation has been making myeloma matter since 2005.

As a patient-driven, patient-focused, grassroots organization, Myeloma Canada is dedicated to accelerating access to more effective therapies for Canadians diagnosed with myeloma. The organization drives collaborative efforts between researchers and clinicians, other cancer organizations, government agencies and local support groups across Canada to unify and strengthen the voice of the Canadian myeloma community. Through education, awareness, advocacy, engagement and support for research, we strive to advance the understanding, treatment and management of the disease, as well as provide early awareness programs that promote timely diagnosis and access to vital treatment therapies. Our goal is to effectively shape the Canadian treatment landscape with a committed focus on improving patient outcomes and improving the quality of life for patients, their caregivers and families.

Myeloma Canada ensures the patient voice is heard by empowering and engaging the community to take action at all levels, from clinical trial design to patient care. **For more information about how Myeloma Canada is making myeloma matter, please visit myeloma.ca.**

MYELOMA REMAINS RELATIVELY UNKNOWN DESPITE ITS GROWING PREVALENCE.

Some statistics to consider:

- Every day, 8 Canadians are diagnosed with myeloma.
- Fairly uncommon before the age of 40, most people are in their 60s when they are diagnosed with myeloma.
- Approximately 290,000 Canadians alive today are expected to develop myeloma at some point in their lives.
- In 2017, over 2,900 new cases of myeloma were diagnosed across Canada, roughly 340 of whom are Alberta citizens
- In 2017, myeloma accounted for 1.8% of all cancer deaths*

Our Urgent Concerns:

1. Alberta patients need timely and affordable access to effective myeloma treatments. Without these treatments, patients will die.
2. Additional investments in research are needed to improve treatments and ultimately find a cure.

Our Immediate Requests to the Alberta Government:

I - Accelerate, simplify and improve accessibility to effective myeloma treatments:

1. **Ensure that provincial drug budgets** reflect the growing need for drugs to sustain and maintain the health and quality of life of Alberta citizens, including myeloma patients.
2. **Implement public policy reforms** to accelerate and improve accessibility to effective cancer treatments, including myeloma:
 - a. Clarify and streamline the roles of the federal and provincial governments, and their agencies, so as to avoid duplication, delays and unnecessary resources in reviewing and approving potentially life-saving therapies.
 - b. Engage patients at all levels of the drug approval process.
3. **Invest in myeloma and cancer research** to improve the health outcomes of myeloma patients in Alberta and ultimately find a cure for the disease.

II - Invest in myeloma research

1. **Invest more provincial funding** in health research and clinical networks.
2. **Incentivize industry** to participate in health research and clinical networks.
3. **Leverage investments and research tools** that are supported by clinics and patients in Alberta. By way of example, researchers can tap into the Myeloma Canada Research Network (MCRN) Canadian Multiple Myeloma Database. This unique national database captures “real world” evidence, the data that is most sought after by decision makers and policy makers. The data also informs of Canadian-designed clinical trials and can help clinicians identify risk groups and gaps in current treatments. This unique program, and the only one of its kind, is Chaired by Chaired by Dr Chris Venner, hematologist from the Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton. [Read here for more.](#)

** Based on the 2017 incidence rate of myeloma provided by the Canadian Cancer Society, and the annual population growth projected by Statistics Canada*