

SENATE DEBATES NATIONAL BRAIN STRATEGY

Senator Carstairs tabled a PM motion on Tuesday, February 1, 2011 calling on the Government of Canada to develop a National Brain Strategy. Please find her speech below:

The Senate

Motion to Urge Government to Provide Funding for Development of National Brain Strategy-Debate Adjourned

Hon. Sharon Carstairs, pursuant to notice of December 8, 2010, moved:

Whereas the Senate of Canada recognizes that brain conditions, including developmental, neurological and psychiatric diseases, disorders, conditions and injuries, are a priority health, social and economic issue threatening the well-being and productivity of Canadians;

Whereas 5.5 million Canadians are living with a neurological disease, disorder, or injury and an estimated one in three Canadians will be affected by a neurological or psychiatric disease, disorder or injury at some point in their life;

Whereas the federal government has a leadership and coordination role with regards to health care in Canada; and Whereas a targeted, coordinated National Brain Strategy developed in collaboration with government, non-profit and private sector stakeholders and focusing on innovative approaches to address research, prevention, integrated care and support, caregiver support, income security, genetic discrimination and public education and awareness would minimize the impact of brain conditions in Canada;

Be it resolved that the Senate of Canada urge the Government to provide funding for the development of a National Brain Strategy for Canada; and That a message be sent to the House of Commons requesting that House to unite with the Senate for the above purpose.

She said: Honourable senators, evidence suggests that 11 million Canadians are living with a brain condition. Brain conditions include developmental, neurological, those things caused by injuries, which amount to about 5.5 million Canadians. Another 5.5 million Canadians suffer from psychiatric disorders. There are over 1,000 of these diseases, conditions and injuries affecting the brain, spinal cord and nervous system. Dementia, Alzheimer's, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, cerebral palsy, brain tumours, autism, schizophrenia, spinal cord injuries, and brain stem injuries, these are just a few of the conditions that affect the health, social and economic well-being of Canadians.

Honourable senators, the brain is a complex organ made up of approximately 100 billion neurons. In the past 15 years, researchers have learned much about

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the functioning of the human brain, but they still have far to go in understanding this organ that is critical to our health and our well-being.

What they do know is that brain conditions do not discriminate. They affect the young and the old. They affect the rich and the poor. They affect women and they affect men. They involve a complex interplay of genetic and environmental factors that can strike at any time. Many diseases are degenerative and progressive and most, at the present time, have no known cure. Even when therapies may exist to treat a condition, often they only slow but do not halt its progression.

One in three Canadians, therefore, will be affected by neurological or psychiatric disease, disorder or injury at some point in their lives. This figure, regrettably, is expected to increase with population aging.

(1530)

For example, approximately half a million Canadians are affected by dementia today, or one in every 11 Canadians over the age of 65. We will see that number increased 2.3 times by the year 2038. Dementia is only one of the conditions that would be covered by a national brain strategy.

Brain health is more than just an important health concern. Immediate action is required to develop a national policy framework to deal with the social and economic impact of brain conditions.

Health Canada has conservatively evaluated the economic burden of neurological and psychiatric illness at \$22.7 billion, but this estimate fails to take into account suffering and disability that do not result in death and hospitalization because Health Canada has used mortality data to arrive at that figure. However, the leading causes of mortality are not the same as the leading causes of disability; nor does the estimate account for lost productivity and psychological costs to patients, their caregivers and other family members. When disability is included, the economic burden is much higher.

Brain disorders are among the leading causes of death in Canada and are the leading cause of disability. The progressive and degenerative nature of many of these conditions has a serious impact on patients and their caregivers. Often progressive disability means serious long-term care needs, loss of income and loss of productivity, often not only for the patient but for immediate family members.

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The federal government is uniquely placed to play a leadership and coordination role in the development of a national brain strategy. It already has committed to a \$15-million, four-year National Population Health Study of Neurological Conditions, jointly led by Neurological Health Charities Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada.

The study was launched in June 2009 and is expected to be completed in 2013. Its purpose is to fill gaps in knowledge about the state of neurological conditions in Canada and the experiences of individuals with neurological conditions, their families and caregivers. However, to be able to act upon the research findings, work needs to be done now to develop the framework of a national brain strategy.

Honourable senators, we need a targeted, coordinated national brain strategy developed in collaboration with government, non-profit and private-sector stakeholders. The strategy needs to focus on innovative approaches to address research, prevention, integrated care and support, caregiver support, income security, genetic discrimination, and public education and awareness.

An investment in a national brain strategy now will leverage the government's current investment in this study by building collaborative partnerships and positioning governments and private and non-profit stakeholders to act quickly on research results.

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We know that the burden of brain conditions is not lessening. It is increasing at alarming rates. It is estimated that within the next 20 years, brain disorders will become the leading cause of death and disability in Canada. The longer we wait, the more difficult it is for those who suffer from a brain condition and the longer before we can implement policy decisions and practices that can alleviate the burden for those with the disorders and their families.

I ask honourable senators to support this motion calling on the federal government to provide financial support to a national brain strategy, and that a message be sent to the other place asking them to unite with us in this regard.

(On motion of Senator Comeau, debate adjourned.)

(The Senate adjourned until Wednesday, February 2, 2011, at 1:30 p.m.)