

## Speaking Notes – January 30, 2008

*Scott Dudgeon, CEO, Alzheimer Society of Canada*

Merci Ray.

The Canadian population is aging. Currently 4.3 million Canadians are age 65 or older, meaning that one in seven are now senior citizens. By 2015 the number of seniors is expected to reach 5.4 million, a huge increase. En 2015 5,4 millions de canadiens atteindront 65 ans et plus.

As many of you know, aging is also the largest risk factor for dementia. This means that as our population ages, the prevalence of this disease will increase dramatically. So much so that the approximately half million Canadians currently living with Alzheimer's or related disease is expected to double within the next generation. Le demi million de canadiens vivant avec la maladie d'Alzheimer doublera d'ici la prochaine génération.

Economically, the picture is just as discouraging. Économiquement la situation est décourageante. A Canadian government study completed in 1995 estimated total annual costs of dementia at \$5.5 billion. A much more recent study, a very recent study, estimated that in Ontario alone these numbers are closer to \$7 billion a year. \$7 milliards. Just in Ontario.

In fact, as we look into the not so near future it appears that dementia may be prove to have the highest economic, social and health care cost burden of all diseases in Canada.

Exactly what this means for this country and the Canadian health care system is something the Alzheimer Society is working to determine. Thanks to the funding grant of \$60,000 from the Ministry of Health and to a grant of \$90,000 from Pfizer Canada, the Society has commissioned a study that's going to give us a look at the disease prevalence now and by year for the next 30 years and the economic impact of the disease for the same period.

As we await the results of our study, I'm encouraged to say that our knowledge about this disease and how to care for people living with it has come a long way in the last decade. People are being diagnosed earlier and with greater accuracy than ever before.

Once diagnosed, people have access to treatments that help alleviate some of the symptoms of the disease, improve their quality of life and their family physicians are now able to provide them with the very best in evidence based care thanks to the release today of the new consensus guidelines on the diagnosis and treatment of dementia. Dr. Howard Chertkow has led a group of experts over the last couple of years in developing the best possible advice on the management of dementia, and it's being released in the Journal of the

Canadian Medical Association. This is a real landmark event because now people providing care on the front lines have the best possible evidence of how to proceed.

We have also come a long way in understanding what causes dementia, and how we can help to reduce our own risk of developing the disease. January 2<sup>nd</sup> the Society launched our 2008 awareness campaign, which called on all Canadians to make the commitment to improving their brain health.

I made my commitment, as did many other people at the Society and the Alzheimer community. We committed to things like eating more fish, increasing our physical activity, finding time to join a club or do daily crossword puzzles or something as simple as wearing a helmet while participating in sporting activities.

So, for the Parliamentarians that are in the room today, I'm going to ask those of you who haven't been given a kit to find one of our staff and get something that you can send in to us and we'll post on our website your commitment to your own brain health.

If you can't find a kit – I've got a notepad on that table where you can just give us your e-mail address and we'll be happy to contact you, because Canadians from coast to coast wish you the best of brain health.

Now I'd like to turn the floor over to Brenda Hounam, a volunteer board member of the Alzheimer Society. Brenda was 53 when she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and for the last 8 years has remained a passionate and effective advocate for people living with dementia and is here today to tell you her story.