

September 27, 2007

Mr. Stephen Harper
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A2

Dear Mr. Harper,

Please accept this letter of concern regarding the current legislation on eligibility criteria for the Canada Pension Plan (CPP).

As members of the Canadian Association of Nephrology Social Workers (CANSW), our mission is to advance excellence in the care of persons living with Chronic Kidney Disease and their families. Our clients all suffer from chronic illness; many of them require dialysis. Most of them suffer from many symptoms including nausea and extreme fatigue as well as heart, lung, and urinary complications. As advocates, CANSW and its members are dedicated to increasing awareness of issues affecting this population.

Within our practices across Canada, many of us have met individuals living with chronic disease who are denied access to CPP Disability Benefits due to what we are calling "The Four in Six Glitch".

In order for an individual to currently be eligible for a Canada Pension Plan Disability benefit, he/she must:

- Be under age 65;

- Have a disability which prevents him/her from doing any work on a regular basis for a prolonged period of time; and

- Have made enough valid contributions to the Canada Pension Plan while he/she was working (with enough valid contributions having to be made within at least four of the last six years).

While we work with a number of individuals who easily fit within the first two criteria, the third requirement of having to have made adequate contributions within at least four of the last six years ("The Four in Six Glitch") is resulting in a number of deserving individuals being denied assistance.

Many of these folks have contributed to CPP for over twenty years of their working lives (often having contributed the maximum amounts annually); however, for a number of reasons including illness, they have not been able to work for the last number of years. These individuals and their families are desperately struggling to make ends meet (often living on a spouse's single employment income). Sadly, because of this income, they are often denied eligibility for assistance through provincial income support programs across our country.

It seems unjust that individuals who have made previous contributions to the Canada Pension Plan for many years are not eligible for any assistance. It is even more disheartening to witness kind, proud, and hard working Canadians lose hope in "the system".

As members of the Canadian Association of Nephrology Social Workers, we want to reintroduce hope to these individuals by raising awareness of the flaws inherent in the current eligibility criteria for CPP Disability Benefits. We urgently request a much needed review of the Canada Pension Plan legislation.

Sincerely,

Member, Canadian Association of Nephrology Social Workers