

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Epilepsy Ottawa Set to Shine Light on Epilepsy During Epilepsy Awareness Month ***Almost 10,000 in Region Living with Epilepsy; tens of thousands more impacted***

OTTAWA (February 27, 2017) – Epilepsy Ottawa is planning several events and initiatives throughout March – Epilepsy Awareness Month – with the goal of raising awareness about a medical condition that affects more people than multiple sclerosis, parkinsonism, and cerebral palsy *combined*. In the Ottawa region alone, almost 10,000 people are living with epilepsy, and tens of thousands more – including families and friends – are impacted.

“The physical, psychological, and social impacts of epilepsy are often greater than that of other chronic conditions, and the health care and indirect economic costs can be huge,” says Peter Andrews, board president of Epilepsy Ottawa. “Yet – largely because of stigma – very few people talk about it.”

According to a [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) 2014 report, epilepsy ranks second in direct health care costs in Ontario (behind Alzheimer’s and other dementias and ahead of parkinsonism) and second in indirect economic costs (behind hospitalized traumatic brain injury and ahead of multiple sclerosis). Indirect costs, which are significantly higher than direct, are associated with premature death and disability in working age people.

“Epilepsy Awareness Month provides us with an ideal opportunity to reduce stigma by educating people about epilepsy and seizure disorders,” says Nikki Porter, the executive director of Epilepsy Ottawa. “Our ultimate goal is to help break down the barriers that prevent people with epilepsy from living life to the fullest.”

Among Epilepsy Ottawa’s upcoming plans:

- **February 28: Epilepsy Action Day at Queen’s Park.** Porter and representatives from other epilepsy agencies across the province hope to educate decision-makers about epilepsy, as well as issue a call to action for additional support for the provincial epilepsy strategy rollout.
- **March 14: Information session with Ottawa’s new epileptologist – Dr. Tadeau Fantaneanu.** 6:30-8:30 p.m. at The Bronson Centre, 211 Bronson Ave, Room 109.
- **March 26 –[Purple Day](#) Celebrations at Ottawa City Hall.** Mayor Jim Watson will help raise the Epilepsy Ottawa flag and unveil a week-long immersive project - inspired by New York’s Subway Therapy Project - where people can write epilepsy-related insights or messages of encouragement on purple post-it notes. Official ceremonies will be followed by a reception and ice skating.
- **[#ShineLightOnEpilepsy](#).** Epilepsy Ottawa will encourage people to light a purple candle and/or take a picture of a purple light and share it on social media using [#ShineLightOnEpilepsy](#). The agency will also post regular facts and questions about epilepsy on social media using this hashtag, inviting others to engage and help shine light on epilepsy.

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QUOTES

Inspired by Canadian Playwright Judith Thompson’s Perfect Pie, **Peter Andrews, Chair of Epilepsy Ottawa:** “Imagine that you are living your life and you have a stalker behind you all the time. You don’t have any idea when they will trip you, throw you to the ground, and knock you unconscious. All you know is that they ARE going to attack. It could be anywhere, anytime. For many, that’s what it’s like to live with epilepsy.”

QUICK FACTS

- Epilepsy is one of the most common serious neurological disorders. One in 10 people will have a single seizure in their lifetime. One in 100 will be diagnosed with epilepsy.
- Epilepsy has no age, racial, geographic or socio-economic boundaries.
- Every year, more than 6,000 people in Ontario are diagnosed with epilepsy
- More than 90,000 people in Ontario are living with epilepsy (stats from Ontario Brain Institute)
 - 34,000 living with cerebral palsy
 - 28,000 living with Parkinson's
 - 23,000 living with multiple sclerosis
- 70% of people with epilepsy gain seizure control with medication alone. The other 30% can seek additional treatment options, such as surgery and diet therapies. Some people never gain seizure control and will struggle with seizures throughout their life.
- Regardless of seizure control, people with epilepsy may experience the impact of epilepsy stigma, including:
 - Barriers to education or employment
 - Loss of friendships and relationships
 - Social isolation
 - Depression
 - 1 in 4 people with epilepsy have active depression
 - Over 50% of mothers whose children have epilepsy will experience depression within two years of the diagnosis.
- Without seizure control, people with epilepsy can experience a significant impact on independence and quality of life, including:
 - Loss of driving privileges
 - Memory impairments and possibly other cognitive deficits.
 - Higher mortality rates, including SUDEP (Sudden Unexplained Death in Epilepsy)

LINKS FOR MORE INFORMATION

Epilepsy Fact Sheet: http://epilepsyottawa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/epilepsy_fact_sheet.pdf

Infographic: epilepsyottawa.ca/info

Information about epilepsy: epilepsyottawa.ca/about-epilepsy/

Seizure First Aid Videos: epilepsyottawa.ca/resources/videos/

ABOUT EPILEPSY OTTAWA

Epilepsy Ottawa is a not-for-profit, charitable agency dedicated to improving the quality of life for those living with epilepsy or seizure disorders and those closest to them through support services, education, advocacy, and on-going public awareness. Epilepsy Ottawa provides services to those affected by epilepsy in the Ottawa region, including the wider rural communities (Lanark County, Renfrew County, Prescott-Russell County, and Stormont Dundas & Glengarry Counties).

For more information and/or to schedule an interview, please contact:

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