

## **Consumer Advisory Council & Partnerships**

By: Cheryl Kohen

Partnerships involve a relationship that is collaborative and synergistic, and helps each partner develop an association with enhanced benefits that neither could achieve alone. The Consumer Advisory Council (CAC), that works to ensure the relevance and accessibility of the Canadian Arthritis Network's (CAN) research, strongly believes in fostering such partnerships.

An excellent example involves the Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance (CAPA). CAPA helps people with arthritis become more effective advocates. The CAC have linked with corresponding members of CAPA's executive to share in the discussions, strategies, recommendations and decisions made by the CAC. The wisdom and experience of the much larger membership of CAPA supplies input to CAC, which in turn allows the Advisory Council to expedite their suggestions and recommendations to CAN's management and R&D committees. The end result is that people with arthritis have a say in how arthritis research dollars are committed.

Another example involves (TAS). The mission of TAS is to promote the best possible care and treatment for people with arthritis. Working together, TAS and CAC shared a presentation with the Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada a.k.a. the "Romanow Commission" chaired by Roy Romanow). This partnership helped to ensure the 7 million people with arthritis in Canada have a voice in a report that will help shape Canada's future policies and practices in health care.

CAC has also teamed with TAS in their innovative Joints in Motion (JIM) program. It encourages people, especially those with arthritis, to take part in marathon programs, and raised \$2.5 million in 2000, its first year. This September, more than 200 Canadians will fly to Belgium for the Flanders Fields Marathon. CAC and TAS members will form a relay team for the 44 Km fund-raising walk.

An area of partnership that is in dire need of attention is in alerting the arthritis community across Canada about how important it is to encourage, promote and unify people with arthritis to become involved in meaningful participation in arthritis research. To this end, CAC is making plans for a pan-Canadian Solidarity workshop early in 2004. It will bring together, as partners, a joint initiative of persons with arthritis, CAPA, Patients as Partners, and Arthritis Consumer Experts. The two-day event will focus on self-empowerment, skill building and group advocacy.

Most Canadians are not aware that arthritis, the leading cause of long-term disability, costs close to \$17 billion a year for treatment and management of the more than 100 types of arthritis. There is no cure for these diseases, and partnerships are an extremely effective way of coping with this arthritis crisis.

Other CAC partnerships include Best Medicine Coalition, Cochrane Musculoskeletal Consumer Group, Patient Partners (Prescription for Education) and Veterans Affairs Canada.