



October 11, 2018
For Immediate Release

**Arthritis Consumer Experts Awards
Government of Yukon and Université de Montréal as
Best Workplaces for Employees Living with Arthritis**



(Vancouver) – After its fourth annual search across Canada, Arthritis Consumer Experts (ACE) today announced the winners of **Canada's Best Workplaces for Employees Living with Arthritis** award: the Government of Yukon and Université de Montréal.

ACE is highly supportive of Canadian employers' efforts to develop policies to ensure high quality health benefits and flexible work arrangements for Canadian workers living with arthritis. For workers with chronic diseases such as arthritis, the challenge involves balancing the demands of managing their disease and of working 'around' symptoms such as daily pain, fatigue, joint dysfunction and immobility.

"Arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions are the leading cause of work disability in Canada," said Cheryl Koehn, Founder and President, Arthritis Consumer Experts. "Managing challenges at work is an important element of disease management for employees living with arthritis. We're calling on all plan sponsors in Canada to look carefully at their health benefit plans from the perspective of employees living with arthritis."

Based on workplace insights shared by employees and company managers, the Government of Yukon and Université de Montréal stood out for their supportive work environments highlighted by chronic disease awareness, high quality benefits, wellness programs and prevention practices.

"Supporting all our employees to fully participate in the workplace makes for a more engaged workforce and ultimately better service to the Yukon public. That is why the health, safety and wellbeing of our employees is of paramount importance. We provide flexible working hours, a robust benefits program, and workplace accommodations to help our employees safely stay at work and maintain a healthy work-life balance," said Ms. Pamela Muir, Public Service Commissioner, the Government of Yukon.

Work disability from arthritis costs \$13.6 billion per year, according to an estimate of the economic burden of illness by Statistics Canada – 1 in 136 workers has rheumatoid arthritis (RA), the most disabling and costly type of the disease and **that number will double in 30 years**. In addition, studies have clearly shown that the cost of being present, but less productive, is higher than the cost of being absent, with a workforce survey showing the cost was four times higher than the cost of missed days from work. Researchers at Arthritis Research Canada (ARC) have reported rates of work disability for people with RA, the prototype of inflammatory arthritis, ranging from 25% to 50% at 10 years and increasing to 50% to 90% after 30 years of disease. Studies show that work disability occurs early on in the course of RA, with the greatest loss occurring within the first 1–2 years, followed by a steady decline.

According to Dr. Diane Lacaille, Professor and Associate Head Academic Affairs, Division of Rheumatology, Department of Medicine, University of British Columbia, employees working with the disease face distinct challenges: "Few workers actually request job accommodations, and many people with arthritis (almost half) do not disclose they have it to their employers or co-workers, and prevent themselves from accessing job accommodations for fear of resentment from co-workers or of negative repercussions on their career advancement." The developer of the Making it Work™ program, Dr. Lacaille added: "They did not want to be singled out by requesting a job accommodation. Workers with arthritis would be very receptive to a work environment that recognizes the individual needs of workers, and makes these types of arrangements available to workers for a variety of reasons."

Commenting on ACE's Best Workplace award program, managers at the selected organizations shared the view that employees living with arthritis value high quality benefits with strong drug plan coverage and plan sponsors' responsibility to acknowledge the drug plan's growing role as a source of insurance for plan members in greatest need. During ACE's interviews with employers, many reported a large number (approx. over 80%) of employees used their drug plan at least once in the past year. At the same time, many were not clear on the placement in therapy and value of conventional and biologic and biosimilar disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs) for employees living with a chronic disease such as arthritis.

According to Dr. Lacaille, the goal of medical treatment for inflammatory arthritis today is to eradicate inflammation. "Our primary aim is to focus on disease remission because that's the only way we can prevent the joint damage and the physical disability. Studies that have looked at starting treatment within the first six weeks of having symptoms actually show remission rates of a third and sometimes up to almost a half," she said. "We have to get to the patients with our DMARDs early on, reassessing them regularly and constantly modifying them—increasing, switching, adding—until we reach our

target of no swelling, no markers of active inflammation and no X-ray progression.”

The more expensive biologics are used only after failure of traditional DMARDs. In Canada, approximately 10% to 15% of inflammatory arthritis patients are on biologics.

“ACE continues to share with private health insurers and plan sponsors and their advisors how biologic DMARDs can improve physical function, pain and fatigue and slow down progression of the disease,” said Cheryl Koehn.

About Canada's Best Workplaces for Employees Living with Arthritis

Canada's Best Workplaces for Employees Living with Arthritis is a national campaign to help employers better understand arthritis in the workplace and recognize companies who offer exceptional work environments for their employees living with arthritis. Through a rigorous selection process using wide-ranging criteria, Arthritis Consumer Experts evaluates Canadian companies that apply best arthritis practices. The application process delivers insights to further strengthen Canadian companies' approaches to creating a more productive and arthritis-friendly work environment by helping employers and employees assess their companies' awareness of arthritis and support systems for employees living with the disease.

About Arthritis Consumer Experts

Arthritis Consumer Experts is a national organization that provides free, science-based information and education programs in both official languages to people with arthritis. ACE serves people living with all forms of arthritis by helping them take control of their disease and improve their quality of life through education and empowerment. Founded and led by people with arthritis, ACE also actively advocates on arthritis health and policy issues, through ACE's JointHealth™ family of programs and the Arthritis Broadcast Network, directly to consumers/patients, healthcare professionals, media and government. ACE is guided by a strict set of guiding principles, set out by an advisory board comprised of leading scientists, medical professionals and informed arthritis consumers.

For further information, please contact:

Kelly Lendvoy

Vice President, Communications & Public Affairs

604.974.1129

lendvoy@jointhehealth.org