



## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Potential treatment for COVID-19 should not harm Canadians living with lupus**

March 23, 2020 - Lupus Canada and the Canadian Network for Improved Outcomes in Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (CaNIOS) are calling on the Government of Canada to ensure critical supply of hydroxychloroquine for Canadians living with lupus.

"Like all Canadians, we are eagerly awaiting a treatment for COVID-19, to help end this extraordinary pandemic," said Tanya Carlton, Volunteer President of Lupus Canada. "We at Lupus Canada, as well as researchers and medical professionals at CaNIOS, are aware of increased efforts of using hydroxychloroquine as a treatment for COVID-19. Let us be clear. While we share in the optimism that hydroxychloroquine may be a viable treatment for COVID-19, this must not impact the supply for Canadians living with lupus."

Anti-malarial medication like hydroxychloroquine play a critical role for people living with systemic lupus erythematosus – the most common form of lupus. For those living with lupus, hydroxychloroquine is proven to reduce mortality by 50%, prevent disease flares, reduce the need for hospitalization and potentially harmful immunosuppressive drugs, as well as prevent cardiovascular complications and infections.

"While we welcome clinical trials, and applaud pharmaceutical companies who have donated the drug for these trials, in an attempt to find a treatment for and slow the spread of COVID-19, we are greatly concerned about irresponsible messaging, suggesting that 'everyone' should take this drug in the face of very little evidence," said Dr. Christine Peschkin, Chair of CaNIOS and Head, Section of Rheumatology at the University of Manitoba. "As a result, we are concerned at the difficulty Canadians living with lupus are having filling their prescriptions of hydroxychloroquine."

Without access to medication such as hydroxychloroquine, this will lead to further burden on Canada's healthcare system, at such a precarious time. Lupus Canada and CaNIOS have been working with Canadians living with lupus and physicians to raise awareness in this anxious time.

"Because those living with lupus are already immune compromised, they are at a high risk for COVID-19. We cannot compromise on the safety of those living with lupus," said Carlton.

Lupus Canada and CaNIOS are urgently calling on the Government of Canada to ensure that vulnerable patients, like those living with lupus, have access to this critical medication throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **About Lupus Canada**

Lupus Canada is a national voluntary organization dedicated to improving the lives of people affected by lupus through research, public awareness, advocacy and education.

## **About Lupus**

Lupus is a chronic autoimmune disease that has no specific treatment or known cure. It is often called “the disease of a thousand faces” because of its many symptoms. Lupus presents itself differently in everyone and this makes it difficult to diagnose. It can cause constant pain, immobility, organ failure – even death.

One in every 1,000 Canadians is living with lupus. For Canadians living with lupus, disabling pain and fatigue can prevent them from being active members of society - it can prevent them from getting a full education, from working to their full potential, and enjoying culture and recreation activities.

For more information, please contact:

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