



Statement from Lipedema Canada on Supreme Court of Nova Scotia Decision

Today marks a monumental Supreme Court decision for lipedema patient and Director of Lipedema Canada Ms. Crystal Ellingsen. Her experience reflects what thousands of women across Canada with lipedema are experiencing as they struggle to access diagnostic care and treatment. While we acknowledge Nova Scotia Premier Tim Houston's apology, the lack of recognition for lipedema is profoundly disappointing. It's unacceptable that this specific condition continues to be overlooked, especially as the public, healthcare providers, and government often confound it with lymphedema.

Lymphedema is caused by swelling from lymphatic fluid buildup due to damaged lymphatic vessels, mainly in the limbs. In contrast, lipedema is a genetic condition, characterized by abnormal, painful fat that does not respond to diet or exercise, and affects almost exclusively individuals assigned female at birth. It results in disproportionate fat accumulation in the lower body and arms, significantly impacting mobility and quality of life. Lipedema is not well understood in Canada and is often misdiagnosed.

The Premier has identified a “gap for lymphedema care in Nova Scotia” but has failed to acknowledge the substantial population of lipedema patients who lack access to any form of basic care, including diagnosis and treatment. While lymphedema affects approximately 38,000 Canadians, lipedema is estimated to impact more than 2.2 million Canadians. This stark contrast underscores the Premier's oversight of the largest group affected and highlights the urgent need for education for both clinicians and the Canadian government.

The decision from Justice Gabriel highlights the overwhelming obstacles faced by Nova Scotians, and, in turn, by Canadians, needing to access medically necessary out-of-country coverage for lipedema reduction surgery, or for lymphedema surgery.

The lack of education and support for lipedema is truly alarming. Patients are left without access to diagnosis or dedicated specialists, and this condition is glaringly absent from medical school curricula. Without inclusion of the diagnostic code in provincial medical systems or insured benefits coverage for treatment, individuals suffering from lipedema face convoluted processes when applying for medically

necessary out-of-country surgeries. This creates an oppressive burden on every lipedema patient in Canada, highlighting an urgent need for systemic change.

While Crystal has dedicated years to advocating for her healthcare needs against the Nova Scotia government, most lipedema patients lack the resources, energy, or ability to pursue similar remedies. Many cannot afford the costs associated with treatment, nor do they have the capacity to navigate the complex processes involved. This systemic barrier leaves countless individuals feeling trapped and without hope for the care they desperately need.

Lipedema Canada urges Premier Houston to amend his apology to explicitly recognize lipedema as a distinct condition, bridging the critical gap in awareness and care for those affected. We call for a comprehensive strategy to address the glaring lack of services for lipedema diagnosis and treatment in Nova Scotia. This includes the establishment of specialized clinics and the integration of lipedema education into medical training programs to ensure healthcare providers can accurately diagnose and treat this condition. Additionally, we seek a commitment to develop clear pathways for accessing insured benefits and medically necessary surgeries, alleviating the burdens that patients currently face. It is imperative that the Premier takes these steps to ensure that the voices of lipedema patients are heard and their needs are met.

Lipedema Canada welcomes the opportunity to work with the province of Nova Scotia to identify and address the healthcare needs of the lipedema population. We believe that through collaborative working groups, we can develop effective strategies to improve access to care and support for those affected by this condition.

About Lipedema Canada

Lipedema Canada is the leading national organization that provides comprehensive information and services for those living with lipedema, their families, and healthcare professionals who support them. Lipedema Canada aims to promote health for people living with lipedema by fostering a sense of community, increasing awareness among medical professionals, and advocating for government acknowledgment and access to insured benefits coverage for lipedema. Open minds – change lives

Media inquiries:

Holly Hedd, Director of Communications
Lipedema Canada
Communications@LipedemaCanada.org