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CANADA

Blood-disease bill passes the Senate

Bill S-201 aims to support Canadians living with rare but painful sickle cell disease

Ottawa, November 18, 2025 - A bill that could ease the suffering of thousands of Canadians born with a debilitating blood disease has been passed by the Senate and will now be considered by the House of Commons.

Senator Tony Ince's Public Bill S-201, the *National Framework on Sickle Cell Disease Act*, was adopted at third reading on Tuesday, November 18, 2025. Introduced by now-retired senator Dr. Marie-Françoise Mégie, the bill would require the federal government to develop a comprehensive framework to support people affected by sickle cell disease and their caregivers.

Approximately 6,500 Canadians live with sickle cell disease, which is linked to ancestry from regions like West Africa, the Caribbean, the Middle East and South Asia, and thus disproportionately affects the Black community.

People with sickle cell disease have red blood cells shaped like crescents or sickles, causing them to stick together and block the flow of blood. This can lead to extreme pain and starve the body of oxygen. These pain crises can be triggered by extreme temperatures, dehydration, stress and infection. They can also lead to complications that include stroke, organ damage and serious bacterial infections. Treatment frequently involves blood transfusions and patients often require long hospital stays.

Bill S-201's nine-point plan would address a lack of knowledge about the disease among health care professionals by requiring better training and improved disease management through the creation of a national registry and national research network. Other parts of the bill aim to correct financial inequities by making the disease eligible for disability benefits, tax credits and public drug insurance plans. The bill also identifies the need for a more diverse blood supply.

QUICK FACTS

- The life expectancy for people with sickle cell disease is about 55 years of age.
- Patients are frequently treated with blood transfusions. The most compatible blood comes from donors with similar ethnic backgrounds. However, in 2023 only 1% of blood donors in Canada were Black, despite making up 4.3% of the total population.
- The only known cure is a bone marrow transplant; however, the treatment can't be offered to everyone because of the risk of complications.

QUOTES

“This bill has the potential to resolve many of the inequities faced by people living with sickle cell disease. Health care providers outside of major centres often don’t know how to properly treat these patients — they are often ignored, labelled as drug addicts, and left to suffer excruciating pain and permanent organ damage. They are also denied disability benefits and tax credits that are available to other Canadians, and medical researchers in this field have little to no access to funding sources. The House of Commons needs to take up this bill as soon as possible. People with sickle cell disease deserve to be treated with compassion and dignity.”

- Senator Tony Ince

“We have reached a monumental milestone on our journey towards health equity. The Senate’s passing of Bill S-201 makes this a historic moment for people living with sickle cell disease. We celebrate this achievement and look forward to the next steps in the House of Commons.”

- Biba Tinga, Caregiver and President, Sickle Cell Disease Association of Canada

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