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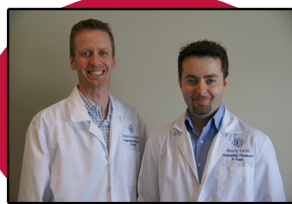
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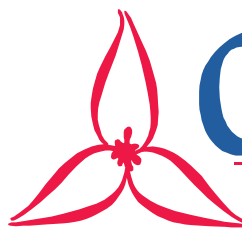


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# Mother of two children with cancer hopes bill will bring relief

*Barrhaven family desperate for relief as Nepean-Carleton MPP gets Private Member's Bill passed*



Lisa Garland says that despite battling cancer, Nicco and Matteo are always happy and positive.

MIKE CARROCCETTO PHOTO

**MOTHER**  
continues on page 4

By JEFF MORRIS  
Thanks to a private member's bill put forward by Nepean-Carleton MPP Lisa MacLeod, there is a light at the end of the tunnel for a Barrhaven family.

MacLeod's bill was passed unanimously on Thurs., Oct. 20. As a result, the Ontario Government will be creating a compassionate and catastrophic care plan for Ontario patients with exceptional circumstances and whose drugs, therapies or treatments are not covered by the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) through the work of an advisory committee to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

For the Garland-Filoso family, the plan can't come soon enough. Lisa Garland and her husband, Nino Filoso, have not one, but two children battling cancer.

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# The IndependentCOMMUNITY

**MOTHER** continues from page 1

"The strain on us financially and emotionally was overwhelming when we had one child battling cancer," Garland said. "When we learned that we had a second kid with cancer, it was just too much."

Garland says that treatment costs and expenses not covered by OHIP, along with lost wages from having to spend time at the hospital and to stay at home to be a care giver, have added up to thousands of dollars a month. Friends have helped raise funds. Strangers have even knocked on their door with envelopes full of cash after hearing about their dire situation.

The passing of MacLeod's bill has given the family hope that they will soon be more easily able to cope with the heavy financial burden they face on a monthly basis.

"The Legislature acknowledged we need to do more to help patients who are maxing their credit card or who are fundraising for their health care," MacLeod said. "By passing this motion, we have sparked thoughtful consideration of how we can best help those with exceptional health care needs with a compassionate and catastrophic health care policy in Ontario. I look forward to the government addressing this immediately."

“Far too many patients are maxing out their credit cards, creating Go Fund Me Campaigns or hosting fundraisers like benefits and bake sales to pay for their basic healthcare. This is an increasing trend in Ontario and it means too many patients are falling through the cracks.”

Members from all

parties joined MacLeod in sharing health care issues in their constituencies and throughout Ontario. MacLeod spoke of cancer patients she knew who were fundraising either for drugs, complimentary therapy or experimental therapy.

“There are so many advancements in technology and innovative drugs it is obvious our health-care system must adapt. In order for us to be nimble and address all aspects of the health care system we must continually look for better ways to help Ontario patients. I am grateful to all MPPs who participated in this debate today,” added MacLeod.

For MacLeod's bill, the Garland-Filoso family in her riding provides the perfect example of why this bill was needed. MacLeod had mentioned the bill on Facebook before it went to legislature. Garland saw it, and saw a number of responses.

"People were posting different things, and I posted, 'Try having two boys with cancer.' It's pretty expensive.' That struck a bell with her and she called me to hear the story about the boys and their cancer, and then she presented the story to the Health Minister at Queen's Park."

The family's struggles began nearly seven years ago. Matteo was 16 months old when he was diagnosed with bladder cancer.

"It sounds strange, but it was almost a relief when we got the diagnosis," Garland said. "Matteo was sick and we went to the hospital a few times and we were coming home without a diagnosis. He was in extreme pain and it was heartbreaking to see

him suffering. When we got the diagnosis, it was like a starting point. We knew his pain could be relieved. We finally knew what was wrong, and then it was time to deal with it. It was horrible to see him in so much pain before his diagnosis.

The family helped little Matteo through a year-and-a-half of treatments. Just when it looked like things were going to be okay after all, an MRI revealed that the young child had prostate cancer. He had to have his bladder and his prostate removed.

“He will never have kids, and he has to pee into a bag,” Garland said. “The bags aren’t covered by OHIP or by extended health care.”

Despite facing a potentially terminal illness, Matteo is a happy and positive kid. He is going to school at St. Patrick in Barrhaven, and he is constantly bringing joy to his parents.

While Matteo is coping, so is his younger brother, Nicco. The five-year-old is also fighting cancer, as he was diagnosed with lymphoblastic leukemia at the age of two, while Matteo was recovering from his surgery.

"It was just too much to handle," Garland said. "I had major PTSD from Matteo and I had to go on medication for anxiety. It was hard on all of us. It was particularly hard on our 13-year-old daughter, Jayden."

Garland said that, fortunately, Nicco's cancer was caught early and is "the best case scenario as far as a two-year-old getting leukemia could be." He has responded well to drugs and treatments,

but it is still a difficult slope for the family.

The cancers the two children have are completely unrelated.

"Our family has no history of any sort of cancer," she said.

The situation has had the family looking down the barrel of a financial gun for the past several years.

"For me, you I had to stop working," said Garland, who is a nurse. "We are lucky that my husband works with his dad in a family business. He has a little more leeway, but it was still difficult. We were down to one income and three kids.

"You have to become a care giver. When there are treatments, there are extra daycare costs. Kids will only eat certain things because of the chemo and radiation. It becomes hugely expensive. Parking and feeding yourself for six months at the hospital is expensive."

Garland said the family's extended health care plan has helped, but it only goes so far.

"There are huge expenses," she said. "The medical plan covers

80 per cent of costs, but that's 80 per cent of \$3,000 per month of injections every month on top of all the other costs."

As gripping as the costs are, Garland said it's not even something she considers when her children are going through their cancer treatments.

"You don't get it until you are in the situation," she said. "You do everything you can for your kids. You just hand out the Visa to whomever to make sure everything's taken care of, but eventually, it catches up."

"I didn't work. I wasn't able to get a loan or any financial help because I didn't work. There is no government assistance for families who are off work. Where are you getting the funds from if no one is working? In our situation, and I can't imagine if people don't have extended health care. Maybe Trillium will kick in to help them out. People are fundraising to bring in extra money to pay for gas to and from hospitals and to pay for food and parking and

everything. It can break someone for sure."

Garland said she can't help but admire the resilience her children have shown.

"I think they exude powers that don't exist in an adult," she said. "With Matteo, his treatment was so harsh, much harsher than what Nicco has had to endure. And I'm not saying what Nicco is going through is by any means easy. Matteo has done everything with a smile. He even laughs in his sleep. It's ridiculous. He is the happiest kid you can imagine. We can learn a lot from them. He just loves living. As long as I know he's okay, I'm okay."

This is MacLeod's second successful private member's business in the last five months. In June, all parties supported her bill Rowan's Law which will create more awareness, better treatment and more research on concussions. Similar to her successful motion today, Rowan's Law work will be done by an advisory committee to the Government, which began its work this past month.

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