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NEWS

'Bureaucratic burden': Liberal MPs Gould, Sidhu, and Sen. Loffreda back up Celiac Canada's request for simpler medical tax credit process

Celiac disease patients are required to keep and submit hundreds of food receipts for their gluten-free items in order to receive financial relief from the federal medical expense tax credit, according to Celiac Canada's Melissa Secord.

BY TESSIE SANCI



Liberal MP Karina Gould, left, and Independent Senator Tony Loffreda have been advocating in Parliament for the federal government to move to a flat-rate refundable tax credit for celiac disease patients trying to claim the medical expense tax credit. Liberal MP Sonia Sidhu, right, who created the all-parliamentary celiac disease caucus, tabled a petition on this issue back in February. *The Hill Times photographs by Andrew Meade and Sam Garcia*

With a process that involves scanning hundreds of receipts and calculating the price differences of a litany of food items, celiac disease patients and some parliamentarians are asking Finance Canada to revamp the time-consuming process for claiming the medical expense tax credit to account for the cost of higher-priced gluten-free food.

"The system actually requires them to keep every single receipt of food they purchase. So, it's every weekly shop, every time they dine out, anytime they're on the road purchasing—they have to keep literally hundreds of receipts," said Melissa Secord, Celiac Canada's national executive director.

The cost of gluten-free products could be anywhere from 100 per cent to 300 per cent more than their gluten-filled equivalent, according to Secord.

Celiac disease is an autoimmune condition whereby consuming gluten results in a person's immune system to react negatively, causing inflammation and damage to the small intestine. Approximately one per cent of people in Canada have the disease, according to Celiac Canada.

The organization is calling on the federal government to eliminate the requirement to submit individual receipts and instead implement a flat-rate refundable tax credit of $1,000 for adults and $600 for children with a documented celiac disease diagnosis.

Secord said her group has suggested to Finance Canada that an income-test component could be a part of any change so it would benefit those of low- or middle-income levels who "are struggling" if officials don't want to offer it to every eligible individual.

"We know the government has a lot of things on their plate, but this is part of the affordability and fairness that people are looking for through this difficult time," Secord said, adding that she's hoping to see the request included in this fall's budget.

"I think it's even more important now, given the tariffs, given the pressures on groceries, given the pressures on food packaging, where people with celiac disease have a greater pressure on managing their medical condition with food. Food is the medicine."

Liberal MP Karina Gould (Burlington, Ont.) said she supports the request. Upon the advice of her doctor, the MP decided 20 years ago to eliminate gluten from her diet after years of experiencing gastrointestinal problems, which included bloating, headaches, and non-stop exhaustion.

"I was at the point where I didn't want to eat anymore because I would feel so sick all the time. … Within three days of me going on a gluten-free diet, all of that went away," Gould said.

She chose not to go through the formal diagnosis process for celiac disease and therefore is not eligible for the tax credit. But the MP has heard stories from others about the "really arduous" process, which includes calculating the price difference between a purchased gluten-free item and a comparable product. She said the process is a "burden and stress" on people making the claims and "unnecessary bureaucratic red tape" for those who resolve them.

"I'm assuming that not everyone gets audited, but every once in a while, people do get audited on this, and that's a lot of work for what is a very small amount of money in the grand scheme of things for an individual at the CRA to do," Gould said.

Independent Senator Tony Loffreda (Shawinegan, Que.) said he became interested in the subject after speaking with celiac disease advocates and hearing the stories of those in other Senators' offices with first-hand knowledge of the process.

"We have created a benefit that works in theory, but often fails in practice. It's not pragmatic," said Loffreda, adding that he supports Celiac Canada's call for a flat-rate refundable tax credit.



Liberal MP Karina Gould says the current process to claim the medical expense tax credit for celiac patients is 'silly' and 'really arduous.' *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

Petition for simpler process gets 33,000 signatures

Another vocal supporter is Liberal MP and long-time House Health Committee member Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Ont.), who spearheaded the creation of the all-parliamentary celiac disease caucus, which she chairs.

The request also has the support of at least 33,870 Canadians who added their names to a parliamentary petition that was sponsored by Sidhu and tabled on Feb. 10, 2026.

Finance Minister François-Philippe Champagne (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Que.) tabled a written response to the petition on March 26. The response noted that the requirement to retain receipts "applies generally to all expenses claimed under the [medical expense tax credit], is consistent with the administration of other tax credits, and is important for ensuring the overall integrity of the tax system." Champagne also said the government would "continue to review this and other tax matters to ensure that the tax system is fair and as current as possible."

When Gould was asked if she thought her government was open to changing the process for celiac patients, she said, "I think there's an openness to reduce red tape, right? And so I think if it's framed in that way [of] how are we going to free up human hours, make a program more fair for Canadians, and reduce the bureaucratic burden, I think there's definitely an openness to it. When you actually go through and sit with someone who's gone through [the process]—it's silly, right? It just doesn't make sense."

This past May, Celiac Canada hosted a breakfast event on Parliament Hill for MPs, which was attended by Gould, Sidhu, Health Minister Marjorie Michel (Papineau, Que.), Liberal MP Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Ont.), who is also Champagne's parliamentary secretary, Conservative MP Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, Ont.), and Bloc Québécois MP Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, Que.), among others.

The menu was gluten-free only, and came with a show-and-tell portion to help parliamentarians understand the process to claim the tax credit. A nearly five-metre board was covered in a few hundred photocopied grocery receipts with gluten-free items highlighted in green marker. The receipts belonged to Andy Carnovale, a semi-retired teacher from Ontario with celiac disease who was there to share his experience.

Many of the parliamentarians were "shocked" at the work that is involved, Secord said.

She shared the typical experience with *The Hill Times*: a claimant must identify each gluten-free food item on their receipt, find the price of a comparable product containing gluten, and calculate the difference. Because gluten-free foods are often smaller than their mainstream equivalents, the difference in price has to be calculated to an individual gram. If someone lives in a gluten-free household, but only one person has the disease, the claimant has to divide the total cost of food so that only the expenses applicable to the celiac patient are submitted.

Secord said Carnovale has told her that it can take half of a morning to submit his receipts to the Canada Revenue Agency because only a handful of receipts can be scanned into the online portal at one time.

"You have to have some math skills, probably some spreadsheet skills, to actually calculate the difference between the gluten-free product and the gluten-filled product," Secord said, adding that this could be a challenge for those who don't have regular employment, access to a computer, have low-tech skills, or are new to the country.

Secord said a survey conducted by her organization found that 70 per cent of respondents say they don't



Melissa Secord, Celiac Canada's national executive director, says celiac disease patients who want to claim the federal medical expense tax credit have to 'keep literally hundreds of receipts.' *Photograph courtesy of Melissa Secord*



Carnovale stands in front of a five metre-long board with hundreds of his grocery receipts which he has to submit to the CRA's online portal in batches. *Photograph courtesy of Celiac Canada*



Health Minister Marjorie Michel observes the board of grocery receipts at Celiac Canada's May 5 event on the Hill where the group advocated for a simpler medical expense tax credit process for those with celiac disease. *Photograph courtesy of Celiac Canada*

claim the medical expense tax credit because "it's just unmanageable, [an] administrative burden, full of red tape."

"Food is medicine for Canadians with celiac disease," said Loffreda, who has advocated for Celiac Canada's tax credit request in the Senate.

"Our tax system should recognize that reality without requiring families to complete an accounting exercise every time they buy groceries."



Independent Senator Tony Loffreda, right, with now-former CSG Senator Mohammad Khair Al Zaibak in January 2026. The Canadian tax system should recognize that food is medicine for celiac patients 'without requiring families to complete an accounting exercise every time they buy groceries,' says Loffreda. *The Hill Times photograph by Sam Garcia*

'This is not a choice. This is a medical requirement,' says Secord

Celiac Canada's advocacy efforts have also been a chance to educate parliamentarians about the debilitating effects of celiac disease, its status as an autoimmune condition, and the potential long-term consequences if a celiac person does not eat the proper foods.

Those consequences could include anything from chronic diarrhea and migraines to long-term neurological conditions, reproductive problems for men and women, and bone-health issues, according to Secord.

"It's not a choice. We've had some comments where they say, 'Well, my girlfriend's vegan.' That's a choice. Celiac disease is not a choice. We respect people's choice, but this is not a choice. This is a medical requirement, and that [education is] part of our work on the Hill," Secord said.

"It is really important that we make this diet affordable so that people can access the food to keep them from those long-term health consequences that then put a big pressure on an already over-pressured health-care system," she said.

Gould said that when she told people 20 years ago that she eliminated bread from her diet, they thought she was joking because "it was such an alien concept whereas now we know that it's an autoimmune disease. We know that it can cause really serious health risks and outcomes."

"I think it's something that we really need to look at as a government and as a country. It will reduce the anxiety and burden and financial burden that people with celiac disease are experiencing," Gould said.

tsanci@gmail.com
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