Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is a chronic disease that attacks the central nervous system (the brain, spinal cord and optic nerves). The progress, severity and specific symptoms of MS cannot be predicted. MS is a lifelong disease for which a cure is yet to be found; however, doctors and scientists are making discoveries about the treatment and management of MS every day.

**General facts about MS**

- **25,600+** There are over 25,600 people living with MS in Australia.
- Diagnosis of MS is mostly between the ages of 20 and 40 years.
- On average more than 10 Australians are diagnosed with MS every week.
- Three quarters of all people with MS are women.
- In young adults MS is the most common acquired disease of the central nervous system.
- 2.3 million people are living with MS worldwide.

**Forms of MS at diagnosis**

- 15% diagnosed with a progressive form of MS
- 85% diagnosed with relapsing remitting MS (RRMS)

Many people who start with RRMS will eventually develop secondary progressive MS (SPMS); a progressive worsening of neurologic function over time.

**Common symptoms of MS**

The symptoms of MS can be both visible and invisible to others, are unpredictable and vary from person to person and from time to time in the same person. They include:

- visual disturbance, such as blurred or double vision
- dizziness and vertigo
- emotional and mood changes
- pain
- sexual changes
- bladder and bowel changes
- sensitivity to heat and/or cold
- altered sensation, such as tingling, numbness or pins and needles
- altered muscle tone, such as muscle weakness, tremor, stiffness or spasms
- difficulties with walking, balance or coordination
- changes in memory, concentration or reasoning
- slurring or slowing of speech
- extreme tiredness (unusual fatigue)
The economic and personal cost of MS

MS is estimated to have cost the Australian community $1.75 billion in 2017.

In 2017, the average cost of MS* per person was $68,382.

Similar to that of someone with Parkinson’s disease or the first year after a stroke...

...triple that of a person with type 2 diabetes.

* Comprising both individual and societal costs.

Of all the various categories that comprise the total cost of MS, lost wages now account for only 32% of the economic burden of MS compared to almost 50% in 2010.

On average, in 2017, the quality of life of people with MS in Australia is 31% less than that of the overall Australian population.

Quality of life for people with MS who are living with severe disability is 41% lower compared to people with MS with no disability.

This substantially reduced quality of life is primarily driven by the impact of MS on pain, independent living, mental health and relationships.

The prevalence of MS

The prevalence of MS in Australia in 2017 was 103.7 people with MS per 100,000, compared to 95.5 in 2010. This increase reflects global trends and likely reflects the increased survival of people with MS.

Tasmania has twice the prevalence of MS than that of Queensland.

64% of people with MS are using a disease modifying therapy*, an increase of 40% since 2010.

* A drug designed to reduce the number and severity of relapses and slow or halt the progression of their MS.

Global experts believe that addressing the impact of smoking, Vitamin D deficiency, obesity and glandular fever could prevent 60% of MS cases.

If there was a vaccine against the Epstein Barr Virus* 90% of MS cases might be prevented.

* the virus that causes glandular fever.

References

1. The Health Economic Impact of Multiple Sclerosis in Australia 2017 report, commissioned by MS Research Australia and prepared by the Menzies Institute for Medical Research, University of Tasmania, August 2018

For information about Multiple Sclerosis and MS Australia: www.msaustralia.org.au