



UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

**MENZIES** 

Institute for Medical Research

**MS**  
Nurses  
Australasia Inc

*Executive Summary*

# MS Nurse Care in Australia

Patterns of access and impact on  
health outcomes



## Recommendations

The findings from the MS Nurse Care in Australia Report indicate that people with MS who are unable to access MS Nurse care are adversely affected in terms of health outcomes. MS Australia has formed a Working Party to action the following four key recommendations.

### 1. Raise awareness

Work is needed to raise awareness of MS Nurses, their value, and the supports and services they provide to people with MS and health practitioners. MS Nurse care is required throughout the entire life trajectory of MS, and should not be tied to the level of disability because early care can prevent or reduce disability and the associated high costs. We recommend:

- a review of existing MS Nurse care resources
- development of new resources where required
- a review of associated distribution channels, including health professional associations and state and territory MS Member Organisations
- sharing this MS Nurse Report to heighten awareness of MS Nurses and their value among funding stakeholders, hospitals, neurologists, people with MS, their advocates and the broader community

### 2. Assist the existing MS Nurse workforce

- Support and expand the MS Nurse workforce through mentorship and preceptorship (directed practical training by experts in the field) programs
- Explore opportunities within university nursing courses to include education about MS Nursing and MS Research Nursing

### 3. Increase the number of MS Nurses

The economic benefits of an expanded MS Nurse service far outweigh the costs. To increase the number of MS Nurses in Australia we need:

- targeted advocacy for the expansion of the MS Nurse workforce to federal and state governments, hospitals, private neurologists, and other potential funders
- to assess funding arrangements for MS Nurse-led clinics, whether MS Nurse Practitioners, Consultants or Specialist Nurses

### 4. Increase access to MS Nurses

- Expand telehealth services to improve access to MS Nurse care - this requires amendment to Medicare which currently covers telehealth appointments with neurologists, but not MS Nurses.
- Advocacy to the Australian Government on this issue is recommended.

## About MS Australia

MS Australia is the national peak body for people affected by MS. We work with the MS community to fund and coordinate MS research, advocate on behalf of people living with MS and drive awareness and education as part of the worldwide effort to solve MS. We work closely with our four state and territory MS Member Organisations that provide services, programs, and support to the MS community nationwide.

# Australian MS Nurses

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Specialist Nurses or MS Nurses are an integral part of the multidisciplinary healthcare team of specialist healthcare professionals providing support, education, advice, and care for people with MS.

However, changes in traditional funding models have reduced the number of MS Nurses in Australia, particularly in rural and regional areas, and overall access.



There are over **25,600** people living with MS in Australia

MS is the most common chronic neurological disease diagnosed in *young adults* in Australia



The number of *MS Nurses* is declining

MS *diagnosis* is typically between the ages of **20-40**



There are approximately

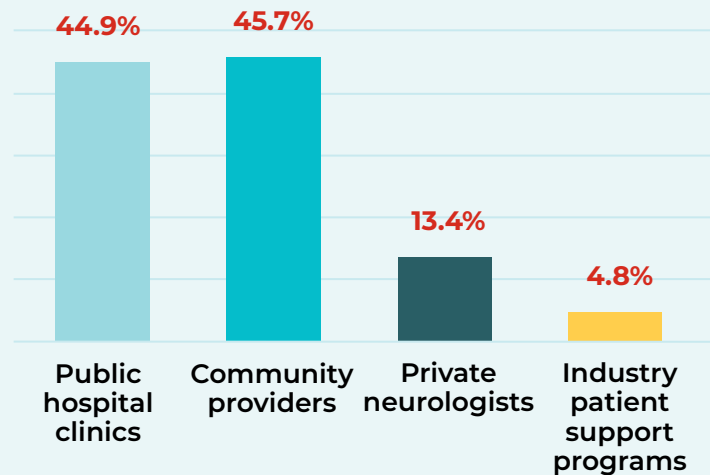
**90**

*MS Nurses* in Australia



This equates to *one nurse* for **284** patients

MS Nurse care is provided at:



MS Nurse Care benefits include:

- + Better *health* outcomes
- + Less unplanned emergency department presentations and *hospital admissions*
- + A highly cost-effective model of care, *reducing MS care costs*
- + Reduced need for other more costly *health professionals*
- + Tailored *care*



**ONE THIRD**

(31.5%) of people with MS studied in Australia *did not have access* to MS Nurse care

It would cost **\$5 million** to provide an *extra 50 MS Nurses* to support these people annually

This would *increase the Australian MS Nurse workforce* by more than half



## Analysis of MS Nurse patterns of access, care, and health outcomes

A survey of 1,417 people with MS in Australia identified the patterns of both access to MS Nurse care and receiving MS Nurse care. We examined whether factors such as personal or clinical characteristics, lifestyle behaviours, or use of disease modifying therapies, influenced whether people with MS received MS Nurse care, or had access.

### Access to Nurse care

Access to MS Nurse care brings health benefits for people with MS. These include lower disability level, slower self-reported disease progression, less severe symptoms, lower levels of depression and anxiety, and a higher quality of life.

31.5% of people with MS in Australia do not have access to MS Nurse care and have consistently worse health outcomes. Among those living in outer regional, remote, or very remote areas, almost half reported having no access to MS Nurse care (48.8%). However, even among those living in major cities, a substantial percentage (28.4%) indicated that they did not have access.

### Value of MS Nurses

MS Nurse care reduces the need for other, more costly health professionals, such as GPs and neurologists and prevents emergency department presentations and potentially, hospital admissions.

It is a highly cost-effective model of care. \$5 million would cover the cost of MS Nurses for the 8,000 people currently without access in Australia. This could reduce the cost of their overall MS care by \$62.2 million annually, assuming cost savings of 10%.

MS Nurses provide tailored care. The survey showed that people with MS were very satisfied with the frequency and type of support provided. This included help with management of MS symptoms, treatments, and side effects. Access to MS Nurses improved self-management and self-care, mostly reflected in better medication management.

### Benefits of MS Nurse care

MS Nurse care directly benefits people with MS and provides better health outcomes.

The *Brain Health: Time Matters in MS* initiative reported that improved access to specialist care in MS reduces disability progression. Other international studies have also demonstrated improved health outcomes and significant cost savings with specialist nursing services for chronic diseases, both within and beyond MS care.

There is a strong case to be made that every Australian with MS should have access to MS Nurse care as part of their ongoing MS management plan. This would result in significant cost savings for MS healthcare in Australia. The results support the need for policies and practices, and access to funding, that will improve access to MS Nurse care.

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This Report is an MS Australia initiative.

The Australian Multiple Sclerosis Longitudinal Study (AMSLS) is one of MS Australia's collaborative research platforms.

The full report can be found at [www.msaustralia.org.au/about-us/reports-and-financials/](http://www.msaustralia.org.au/about-us/reports-and-financials/) or scan the QR code:

