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New campaign shines light on life-changing MS Nurse Care

30 May 2023: MS Australia has today launched a new campaign at Parliament House on World MS Day (30 May) to raise awareness of the crucial role played by MS Nurses.

The [MS Nurses: Life-Changing Care campaign](#) features intimate interviews with MS Nurses and their patients, which showcase the incredible value of MS Nurse care; contributing to a range of health benefits for people with MS, such as lower disability levels, slower disease progression, less severe symptoms, improved mental health, and higher quality of life.

MS Australia says a modest investment of \$6.5m a year would provide an extra 65 MS Nurses to support people living with MS.

The number of people diagnosed with MS has risen rapidly in recent years, [with over 33,000 Australians now living with the disease](#).

At the same time, the number of MS Nurses practising in Australia is in decline (around 90), with approximately only one nurse for every 370 individuals living with MS, highlighting a significant gap in access to specialised care.

Almost one in three Australians living with MS are being deprived of the necessary care and support to manage their condition effectively, impacting their overall wellbeing and quality of life. Access to an MS Nurse is even more challenging in regional Australia.

Addressing a Parliamentary Friends of MS event, the Hon Ged Kearney MP, Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care, acknowledged the immense value delivered by the MS Nurse workforce and pledged her Government's support and engagement in identifying funding pathways to address the workforce shortage.

"We are absolutely focusing on [nursing workforce] – it's what our government is incredibly, absolutely, one hundred per cent committed to. In fact, we have five ministers in the health portfolio; five, and pretty much the number one thing we talk about is workforce, workforce, workforce.

"We couldn't think of any partners better than MS Australia to work with as we pursue that agenda," Assistant Minister Kearney said.

Shadow Assistant Minister for Regional Health, Dr Anne Webster MP said, "I'm very pleased that the government is looking at means and methods to improve multidisciplinary care teams, hub and spoke models, increasing nurses, [and] training in the regions – all of those things make a difference."

Keynote speaker, President of MS Nurses Australasia (MSNA), Meaghan Osborne explained why MS Nurses are so critical.

"MS Nurses make a huge difference to people living with multiple sclerosis. Yet 31.5% of people with MS don't have access to MS Nurse care.

"Every single person living with MS should have equal opportunity to access an MS Nurse across this country, and the dignity and quality of life that such access can ensure," Ms Osborne said.

In addition to providing essential care and support to people with MS, MS Nurses are also a 'cost-dominant' (ie cost saving) healthcare solution.

The recent [MS Nurse Care in Australia report](#) produced by MS Australia in collaboration with the Menzies Institute for Medical Research and MSNA, found that investing \$6.5m to employ an additional 65 MS Nurses would result in savings in excess of \$60m every year.

By providing timely and proactive care, MS Nurses can help prevent hospitalisations and emergency department presentations, which are costly to both the patient and the healthcare system.

Additionally, MS Nurses work together with other healthcare providers, such as neurologists and general practitioners, to ensure that patients receive coordinated and comprehensive care that improves patient outcomes and reduces overall healthcare costs.

MS Australia CEO Rohan Greenland welcomed support from parliamentarians for their recognition of the MS Nurses shortage and the importance of addressing this issue.

"Investing in MS Nurse care is quite simply a win-win. It allows for high-quality care and support for people living with MS while creating solutions that provide a significant return on that investment and a benefit to the healthcare system and all Australians," Mr Greenland said.

MS Australia President, Associate Professor Des Graham, and a person living with MS, says with the prevalence of MS on the rise, we cannot ignore the need for greater access to MS Nurses.

"We look forward to partnering with the Government to ensure all Australians living with MS can access transformative MS Nurse care to live their best possible lives," Associate Professor Graham said.

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About World MS Day

World MS Day is officially marked on 30 May.

First initiated by the [MS International Federation \(MSIF\)](#) and its members in 2009, World MS Day is a day to celebrate global solidarity and hope for the future.

The four-year (2020 – 2023) global World MS Day 'Connections' theme aims to build community connection, self-connection and connections to quality care.

About MS

MS is the most common acquired chronic neurological disease affecting young adults, often diagnosed between the ages of 20 to 40 and, in Australia, affects three times more women than men. As yet, there is no cure. There is no known single cause of MS, but many genetic and environmental factors have been shown to contribute to its development.

In MS, the body's own immune system mistakenly attacks and damages the fatty material – called myelin – around the nerves. Myelin is important for protecting and insulating nerves so that the electrical messages that the brain sends to the rest of the body, travel quickly and efficiently.

As the myelin breaks down during an MS attack – a process called demyelination – patches of nerves become exposed and then scarred, which renders the nerves unable to communicate messages properly and at risk of subsequent degeneration. This means that the brain cannot talk to other parts of the body, resulting in a range of symptoms that can include a loss of motor function (e.g., walking and hand and arm function, loss of sensation, pain, vision changes and changes to thinking and memory).

About MS Australia

MS Australia is Australia's national multiple sclerosis (MS) not-for-profit organisation that empowers researchers to identify ways to treat, prevent and cure MS, seeks sustained and systemic policy change via advocacy, and acts as the national champion for Australia's community of people affected by MS.

MS Australia represents and collaborates with its state and territory MS Member Organisations, people with MS, their carers, families and friends and various national and international bodies to:

- Fund, coordinate, educate and advocate for MS research as part of the worldwide effort to solve MS
- Provide the latest evidence-based information and resources
- Help meet the needs of people affected by MS.