



MBS Time Tiered Items Draft Report Consultation

October 2026



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What is MS?

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) remains one of the most common causes of neurological disability in the young adult population (aged 18–40 years) with over 2.9 million people affected worldwide. More than 37,756 Australians live with MS and over 7.6 million Australians know someone or have a loved one with this potentially disabling neurological condition.

Three times as many women have MS than men. Symptoms vary between people and can come and go; they can include severe pain, walking difficulties, debilitating fatigue, partial blindness and thinking and memory problems. For some, MS is characterised by periods of relapse and remission, while for others it has a progressive pattern of disability. MS can significantly affect quality of life, including through its impacts on pain/mobility, independent living, mental health, relationships and participation in everyday life.

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

George Pampacos
President

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MBS Time Tiered Items Draft Report

Executive Summary

MS Australia welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Review Advisory Committee - MBS Time Tiered Items Draft Report. MS Australia supports the Draft Report's five guiding principles and reforms that improve access to longer GP consultations for people with complex, fluctuating and progressive conditions such as MS and improved data collection. Lived experience demonstrates longer appointments enable holistic, safe and person-centred care, allow multiple or sensitive concerns to be addressed and reduce repeated visits. Contemporary neurological data collection will strengthen primary care policy, service planning and funding decisions.

Lived Experience

This submission draws on the experiences and expertise of MS Australia's [Lived Experience Expert Panel](#) (LEEP). LEEP members are people who live with MS or care for someone with MS and provide expert advice to inform MS Australia's advocacy.

Please note: MS Australia's submission responds to recommendations 1, 5 and 22 of the Draft Report.

MS Australia Recommendations

- The Government should adopt the **five key principles** outlined in Recommendation 1 of the MBS Time Tiered Items Draft Report.
- The Government should **improve time tiered MBS items** to give people with fluctuating progressive and degenerative conditions access to longer GP appointments as outlined in Recommendation 5 of the MBS Time Tiered Items Draft Report.
- The Government ensures the funding of **appropriate and contemporary data collection** as outlined in Recommendation 22 of the MBS Time Tiered Items Draft Report.

Time Tiered Principles

Recommendation 1: That the government adopt 5 key principles to be applied when developing new, or revising existing, MBS items for primary care

MS Australia believes the five key principles recommended by the time-Tiered Primary Care Working Group. We believe these principles will greatly improve the MBS as follows:

- Allowing patients to access longer appointments when they need them
- Providing a more financially sustainable model for GPs, nurses and other health professionals
- Reducing red tape and administrative burden for GPs, nurses and other health professionals
- Improving the data used when making MBS decisions.

MS Australia recommends the Government should adopt the five key principles outlined in Recommendation 1 of the MBS Time Tiered Items Draft Report.

Longer GP Appointments

Recommendation 5: MBS benefits for time-tiered items should equitably support appropriate and varied consultation lengths to ensure patients can access care that meets their individual clinical needs.

MS Australia supports the Time-Tiered Primary Care Working Group recommendation that time-tiered items support appropriate and varied consultation lengths. Access to longer GP appointments is crucial for people living with MS and the testimonials below from members of the MS Australia LEEP outline the range of reasons that they are beneficial.

MS & Comorbidities

People with MS are living with a lifelong, complex neurological disease and each individual experiences a range of symptoms, which can be variable and unpredictable. No two people will experience exactly the same symptoms, and these symptoms can be a one-off occurrence, can come and go or change in severity over time. Many also live with comorbidities including heart disease, osteoarthritis, migraines, anxiety, depression and allergies.

People living with MS are encouraged to actively manage comorbid conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and depression because these can influence MS outcomes. Research also suggests that carrying extra weight may be linked to other health conditions common in MS and may contribute to a pro-inflammatory state associated with neurological inflammation.¹ In some cases, these other health conditions may be a contributory cause of disability or may contribute to the progression or worsening of disability.

Access to longer GP appointments provides an opportunity to address a range of symptoms and comorbidities and ensure that people remain healthy and active:

‘Living with MS means I’m often managing many health issues at once – fatigue, mobility changes, medication reviews, mental health, all on top of the regular health issues that everyone deals with. A standard appointment can feel like I am racing the clock, and barely gives me time to raise one of these complex issues properly, let alone all of them. Longer consultations would mean I could talk through my whole picture of health with my GP, instead of needing to pick my most pressing issue and ignore the rest.

Those longer visits also enable a more holistic management of my health, giving time for the preventative health care and testing that often has to be ignored when appointment time is limited.’ – **LEEP member Rachel Kerr**

‘As a person living with MS, short appointments often mean choosing which concern matters most on the day. With health conditions that shift, overlap and fluctuate, longer GP appointments are useful to ensure there’s nothing left out of the conversation with my doctor. This helps the GP get a full picture of the reality of what I live with each day, improving my overall healthcare.’ – **LEEP member Julie Lonsdale-Light**

‘Living with MS means I never go to the GP with just one issue. I might be dealing with nerve pain, fatigue, balance changes, medication side effects, or a new symptom that’s popped up out of nowhere. Some days my thinking is slower or I lose my words, so it takes longer to explain what’s going on. In a short appointment you end up rushing, forgetting things, or only talking about the problem that feels most urgent. Longer GP consults would let me explain everything properly and give my doctor a clear picture of what’s actually happening to me. It means safer care, better decisions for my health, and feeling like I’m genuinely being listened to.’ – **LEEP member Rachel Fallis**

'Living with Multiple Sclerosis means there is rarely just one thing I need to talk about at my GP appointment. I might come in with fatigue, pain, dizziness or a new symptom, but there can also be questions about medications, mental health, referrals, test results or how everything is affecting my day-to-day life.

The reality is MS doesn't fit neatly into a 15-minute appointment. This often means I have to decide which parts of my health are "important enough" to discuss and which ones have to wait.

Longer GP appointments give people with complex and chronic conditions the time to actually tell the whole story, not just the most urgent sentence. For me, being given the time to properly explain what is happening with my health isn't a luxury, a crucial part of feeling heard, understood and involved in my own care.' – **LEEP member Deanna Renee**

Fluctuating condition

MS is a fluctuating condition where no day is the same. People can cycle through periods of relapse and remission, and symptoms may vary from day to day. Access to longer GP appointments ensure that people know that on their worse days they can spend more time with the GP:

'When you live with MS, it can feel like carrying an invisible bag. Some days it's light, some days it's heavy but every morning you wake up not knowing what MS has packed inside. A standard GP appointment often isn't long enough to unpack that bag. There are no easy 'MS words' inside it, just symptoms, changes and feelings that can be hard to explain. We need time to describe what's happening so our GP can understand what care we need.

Time is money, but good care takes time. Longer GP appointments give people with MS the chance to properly unpack their bag and feel heard, understood and cared for.'

– **LEEP member Rowena Auchterlonie**

Whole of Person Care

For people living with MS, GP visits provide an opportunity to discuss a range of issues including symptoms, referrals, medication management, other health concerns and comorbidities. Longer GP appointments allow them to discuss these in one appointment and for the GP to provide whole of person care. It also gives the GP the opportunity to answer questions, interpret health information, make recommendations and explore other avenues for support including access to allied health. In the long term these can reduce the impact of MS and reduce disease and disability progression:

'Multiple Sclerosis is an unpredictable and complex disease, and living with MS requires extensive day-to-day management. Long GP appointments allow for the involved conversations required to monitor and address current needs, discuss multiple additional health concerns, and plan care to support an uncertain future. Additionally, improved rebates on longer appointments would provide people living with MS the time to discuss all of their diverse health needs whilst minimising the financial impact of appointment costs.' – **LEEP member Kate Casey**

'The GP has a critical role in interpreting complex information and needs into practical advice and actions to a MS patient who may often be anxious, as well as physically unwell. It is most important that this key interaction can take place without the pressure of artificial time limits.'

– **LEEP member Gavin Harper**

'Multiple Sclerosis is a complex and unique disease and my GP is pivotal in managing both my physical and emotional wellbeing. Since diagnosis nearly 9 years ago, I see my GP on a monthly basis with scheduling a long appointment and even then this is often not enough time. GP's have a critical role in managing our care from referrals to a variety of specialists, managing our medication in collaboration with pharmacies, managing and supporting any comorbidities and related care as well as any hiccups that may occur along the way.

I have been seeing my GP since my diagnosis and through his support in my appointments I would not have been heard, validated and cared for had I only had the option of a short consult. Longer consultations are essential for myself and others living with complex health and disabilities and need access to these in a financially viable way. I would love to have further time with my GP as I know that his thorough care for me has assisted with keeping me out of hospital and managing my Multiple Sclerosis in a very proactive manner.'

– **LEEP member Hannah Woolford**

'No experience of MS is the same - the symptoms can be complex, broad and multifaceted. In addition, there is the journey of truly understanding what this MS experience can be. It can be confusing, frustrating and overwhelming. It is also not just physical - it can be emotional and cognitive symptoms too which further complicates a person's journey to understanding their MS condition. Things can change suddenly, then be stable again and then change dramatically. All of these nuances can't possibly be covered and understood in a standard GP consult of approx. 10-15 minutes.

All too often, our health system is rushed and patients are hurried through, and this is so inappropriate, particularly for people with MS and their families. We are so fortunate to have access to many disease modifying therapies as well as complementary allied health therapies that can really improve quality of life for people with MS. But if people with MS and their families/support networks aren't given the time and space to be presented with this information, ask questions, and have collaborative action plans developed, then these opportunities for improved quality of life are lost. Knowledge is power - having longer GP consultations affords our frontline health professionals the time to impart that knowledge and give that power back to the people with MS and their families.'

– **LEEP member Rebecca**

'As well as MS my husband has a number of other health conditions, so we always have a list of questions for the GP. A short appointment where you feel you are being hurried up is not ideal for us, as my husband needs time to process what is being discussed. A longer appointment gives the opportunity for me to voice any concerns and requests, ask any questions and then for him to be involved in any decisions.' – **LEEP member Alison**

"MS is a complex disease which can often present in unexpected ways. Unexpected ways which require longer than the standard 15 minute appointments to discuss and come up with a treatment plan.

This winter, I ended up with a bad cold and visited my doctor to work out the best treatment plan. For people without a chronic illness this would likely have been a simple discussion, though as I am immunocompromised from my MS medication, on top of the standard cold/virus questions my doctor also needed to consider:

- Whether the cold was turning into a secondary infection
- If any medication is required, is that medication safe with my existing MS medications - Is the medication likely to impact any of my existing MS symptoms
- Write a pathology request to check my white cell count.

For someone with MS, a standard 15 minute appointment is not enough to cover everything which needs to be discussed even when the reason for the appointment is as simple as a common cold. By increasing the rebate for longer appointments, it would not only remove the financial pressure associated with scheduling a double appointment for people with chronic illness who already have higher than average healthcare costs." – **LEEP member Sally**

Navigating GP appointments

For people living with MS navigating GP appointments can be complex, timely and overwhelming. When people live with limited mobility it can be very difficult to get to a GP appointment and navigate an examination. Longer appointments mean people can attend the GP less regularly and have all their issues addressed in one appointment:

'Because of its nature, multiple sclerosis is a challenging disability. No day is the same. The common cold and the flu can have a huge impact on me. A muscle pain or a sore back cannot be easily explained away that I slept awkwardly the night before. Simply getting my top off or lying on the examination table is near impossible for me without help. A short GP visit does not give my doctor enough time to examine, explain, and treat me properly.

– **LEEP member Louis Ziras**

'Living with MS, my health is complex, and a standard GP appointment often isn't long enough to look at how my symptoms, medications and other conditions interact. Because of my limited mobility, getting to the GP is hard, so I bring two or three concerns to one longer appointment rather than making several trips. Longer appointments mean better care, yet the current system pays GPs less per minute for providing them. My GP makes that time for me, but she shouldn't be financially penalised for giving patients the care their condition requires. Higher rebates for longer consultations would support more GPs to do this work and help people with complex conditions like MS get the time they need to be heard and make informed decisions about their care.' - **LEEP member Jodi Martin**

Sensitive Issues

Often people living with MS experience a range of sensitive issues that can be difficult to discuss with a health professional, especially during a short appointment. This includes sex and intimacy, mental health and bowel and bladder issues. Longer appointments give people the space and time to have more meaningful conversations, build a rapport and explore those sensitive issues.

'Living with MS is complex and unpredictable. Most of the time when I reach out to my GP, it's because I'm trying to make sense of a cluster of symptoms that overlap and interact, and also sometimes don't always fit neatly into a standard MS pattern. Even when I arrive with a clear list of concerns, a standard appointment time means everything is rushed, and I often leave realising we didn't get to all the pieces.

People with complex health challenges like MS need time, time to articulate and express what we're experiencing, time for our GP to listen and understand, and time to work together on informed decisions. Longer appointments also make it possible to raise issues that are harder to talk about when clock is ticking, like cognitive changes or sexual health impacts. Fatigue, another challenging concern for people with MS, is so personal and complex that it doesn't have a simple vocabulary, it takes time to describe and explore properly with a GP.

I understand that longer appointments aren't always easy to provide and that they cost more than a standard appointment. But when longer appointments are accessible and affordable, they make a meaningful difference. They create space for conversations that would otherwise be rushed or left unsaid and that space directly improves the quality and safety of our care. As a person with MS, I want to leave my GP appointment feeling heard, understood and empowered in my care. I see affordable longer appointment times as essential for safe, informed and effective care.' – **LEEP member Muskaan**

Practices accepting patients

Feedback from LEEP members indicates that it is often hard to find a GP practice that offers longer appointments and will take on patients with chronic conditions:

'An increased rebate for long consultations will make GPs and practices more willing to accept patients with chronic health conditions and ensure there are long appointments available.' – **LEEP member Rachel Kerr**

MS Australia recommends the Government should improve time tiered MBS items to give people with fluctuating progressive and degenerative conditions access to longer GP appointments as outlined in Recommendation 5 of the MBS Time Tiered Items Draft Report.

Data Collection

Recommendation 22 The Government should ensure the funding of appropriate and contemporary data collections to inform primary care policy and funding reform.

MS Australia is a strong advocate for improved data collection to inform primary care policy and funding reform.

There is currently a significant data gap when it comes to neurological and neuromuscular conditions. We believe that high-quality data on neurological and neuromuscular conditions is essential to building a strong evidence base and assisting in planning and prioritising health programs and funding, evaluating the effectiveness of intervention programs and initiatives, and identifying unmet and emerging needs.

As a founding member of the Neurological Alliance of Australia (NAA), MS Australia has advocated along with the NAA for improved data collection through the funding of a national neurological data set. In September 2026, MS Australia welcomed the release of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) updated national estimates for the prevalence of neurological conditions. This estimate showed that 4.5 million Australians (one in six people) are living with a neurological condition. This revised estimate replaces the 2.2 million figure reported in the AIHW's December 2025 neurological conditions report. This doubling of the estimate of neurological conditions shows the value of improved data collection and the hidden health and disability issues when data collection is inadequate.

There continues to be significant gaps in neurological data particularly in priority populations such as:

- First Nations peoples
- Culturally and linguistically diverse groups
- People living in rural and remote communities
- Populations not accessing mainstream services.

Funding to expand and improve the collection of neurological data will provide a better understanding of the intersection between disability and specific neurological conditions, potentially revealing patterns of comorbidity and giving insights into the trajectory of diagnoses, treatment pathways and health service use for specific neurological conditions. This will improve the understanding of the risk and preventive factors associated with specific neurological conditions and support GPs and other health professionals to better support their patients with neurological conditions.

MS Australia recommends the Government ensures the funding of appropriate and contemporary data collection as outlined in Recommendation 22 of the MBS Time Tiered Items Draft Report.

Conclusion

The MBS Time Tiered Items Draft Report provides an important opportunity to make primary care more equitable, sustainable and responsive to the needs of people living with complex, fluctuating and progressive conditions such as MS. MS Australia urges the Government to adopt the five guiding principles, improve access to affordable longer GP consultations and invest in contemporary neurological data collection so that people with MS can receive safe, holistic and person-centred care.

Reference

1

MS Australia (2025). *Living well with MS: Your guide to adapting your lifestyle*. Retrieved from: https://www.msaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/mlf-pwms_master.pdf



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