

Early results show world-first adaptive trial in action for progressive MS

18 September 2026: A potential treatment for progressive multiple sclerosis (MS) will continue in a world-first multi-arm, multi-stage adaptive trial after showing encouraging early signs, with recruitment set to expand across Australia.

Interim results from the UK-based Octopus trial, funded by the UK MS Society, found that alpha lipoic acid showed enough promise to continue testing, while a second treatment, metformin, will not continue.

MS Australia CEO Rohan Greenland said the results were positive news for people living with progressive MS.

"These are positive early results for people living with progressive MS and an important milestone in an international research effort that Australia is helping advance."

The results are the first from Octopus and provide an early demonstration of how this adaptive trial model is accelerating the search for effective treatments.

Rather than testing one treatment at a time and potentially waiting years to discover that it doesn't work, Octopus can test several treatments simultaneously and use early measures to determine which are worth pursuing.

Treatments showing sufficient promise can continue to be studied, while others can be stopped and new treatment arms introduced.

PLATYPUS is the extension of the Octopus trial in Australia, joining Octopus at Stage 2.

Mr Greenland says that through PLATYPUS, Australians are contributing directly to a world-first trial and to the international search for better treatments for progressive MS.

"As the trial expands across Australia, our goal is clear – to accelerate the search for better treatments and address one of the most significant unmet needs in MS," Mr Greenland said.

PLATYPUS is led in Australia by Griffith University neurologist Professor Simon Broadley and internationally as part of Octopus by Professor Jeremy Chataway of University College London.

Professor Broadley explains that people with progressive MS face an inevitable downhill slope with their disease, so having treatments that can slow that progression can be life-changing for them.

As such, he believes the Stage 1 findings are encouraging and very exciting in the search for treatments that can slow the progression of MS.

"The Octopus trial has shown that alpha lipoic acid was of benefit in Stage 1.

"Stage 1 of the Octopus trial assessed clinical and brain atrophy measures over time.

"While this is not proof that it works, it's a positive sign that it may be a benefit, which we're now going to test in Stage 2 over the next three years," Professor Broadley said.

A second treatment, metformin, did not show the early signs of effectiveness required for further exploration.

Its discontinuation demonstrates the adaptive trial design in action, allowing researchers to stop treatments earlier when they are not showing sufficient promise, and focus resources elsewhere.

MSWA CEO Melanie Kiely said the first interim results demonstrated the value of the adaptive trial approach in action.

“MSWA has been the leading funder of PLATYPUS in Australia since its establishment. It's exciting to see the trial advance and expand across Australia, meaning we can move faster, use research resources more effectively and keep homing in on treatments that could improve the lives of people living with progressive MS.”

For Janine Watson, who lives with progressive MS, getting answers faster is especially important.

The Paralympian and member of MS Australia's Lived Experience Expert Panel (LEEP) says an effective treatment for people living with progressive MS would provide a sense of hope.

“It's about giving back time to people with progressive MS and unfortunately with progressive MS, time is not our friend at all,” Ms Watson said.

PLATYPUS recruitment is set to expand across Australia, with participants already enrolled through the lead site at Gold Coast University Hospital, which opened in October 2025, with the next sites expected to open in Perth and Hobart.

Trial participants receiving alpha lipoic acid together with the participants receiving their usual treatment will remain enrolled in Stage 2, where researchers will examine whether alpha lipoic acid can slow the progression of disability.

New treatment arms will also be added as other promising therapies are identified.

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About Octopus and PLATYPUS

Octopus is the world's first multi-arm, multi-stage trial for progressive MS. Its adaptive design allows multiple treatments to be tested at the same time, with treatments able to continue, stop or be added as evidence emerges.

The UK trial is funded by the MS Society and sponsored by University College London's Innovative Clinical Trials Unit, with Professor Jeremy Chataway as Chief Investigator.

PLATYPUS – PLatform Adaptive Trial for remYelination and neuroProtection in mUltiple Sclerosis – is the Australian extension of Octopus, and Professor Simon Broadley of Griffith University is the Country Lead Investigator.

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