

Bunbury Advocate Lynda Whitton Honoured with Prestigious National MS Australia Award

4 FEBRUARY 2025: Bunbury local Lynda Whitton, a dedicated champion for people living with multiple sclerosis (MS), has been awarded MS Australia's highest honour, the 2024 John Studdy Award.

The award recognises outstanding, consistent, and selfless service spanning 10 or more years, honouring those who have made a tangible difference in the lives of people affected by MS.

Lynda has exceeded these criteria, dedicating three decades to advocacy, leadership, and fundraising, profoundly benefiting her peers living with MS and other neurological conditions in Bunbury, Western Australia, and across the nation.

MS Australia CEO Rohan Greenland praised Lynda's extraordinary contributions, highlighting the importance of recognising those who make a lasting impact in the MS community.

"The expansion of MS Australia's awards program reflects our commitment to celebrating incredible people who dedicate themselves to improving the lives of people living with MS," Mr Greenland said.

"For decades, Lynda Whitton has been a powerful advocate, leader, and fundraiser for the MS and the broader neurological community, and this recognition is thoroughly deserved."

Diagnosed with MS in 1996, Lynda faced her condition with determination and resourcefulness, "I'm not one to sit and expect others to do things for me, so I set about making life changes to help me down this new path," she explained.

Her life changes ranged from switching to an automatic car for safer driving to using durable melamine dishes. "You still dropped them," she recalled, "your dinner was still on the floor, but at least the plate bounced back to you."

Lynda joined MSWA and became a vital part of the community, taking on leadership roles to support her peers. For 20 years, Lynda served as President of the Bunbury Outreach Group, fostering a network of support and services for people in the South West of WA.

"My passion for helping anyone comes from life ethics taught by my parents," Lynda said. "If a job needs doing, do it. If someone needs help, help them. And always look for the positives. I know the difficulties and uncertainty anyone with MS is going through, so if I'm in a position to help them, I do it willingly."

One of Lynda's proudest achievements is the Bunbury Swim fundraising event, which she helped establish in 2014. In its first year alone, the event raised over \$55,000—funds that went directly

toward building the fully accessible Bunbury Services Centre in 2016. This essential community hub continues to support up to 100 people with MS and other neurological conditions annually.

Lynda's 13 years volunteering as an MS Australia National Advocate saw her championing the needs of Western Australia's neurological community at both state and national levels, meeting with politicians in Perth and Canberra to improve resources and awareness.

While Lynda has received many accolades, she remains humble about her achievements.

"This award is a huge honour," she said. "Just being nominated was a surprise and an honour in itself. It's also one I don't feel I deserve—this could be shared with so many wonderful people who are also doing amazing things for people with MS."

Lynda also credits her family for their support, particularly in fundraising efforts like the MS Swim.

"We even did a family team for the swim and raised \$21,000 of the \$28,000 total. Their help has been amazing. Anything I have done for MS could not have been achieved without the support of my family," Lynda said.

Today, Lynda remains focused on supporting the Bunbury MS community while cherishing her time with her grandchildren.

"I have eight beautiful grandchildren who melt my heart, so my focus on life now as I get older is to be the best nana I can. It's the best job in the world."

About the MS Australia Awards

The MS Australia Awards honour individuals who have made exceptional contributions to improving the lives of people living with MS.

In 2024, MS Australia expanded its annual awards program, introducing two new awards open to public nomination, the MS Research Award and the MS Advocate Award.

These awards complement the program's legacy of celebrating outstanding service through the prestigious John Studdy Award.

This year's other award recipients include:

- **MS Research Award: Professor Jeannette Lechner-Scott, Newcastle, NSW**

Professor Lechner-Scott is a globally recognised leader in MS research, with decades of groundbreaking work spanning disease mechanisms, biomarkers, and clinical trials. Her current studies, including the impact of pregnancy on MS, continue to inform treatment strategies and improve patient care.

- **MS Advocacy Award: Marianne Gaul AM, Tamworth, NSW**

Marianne is a retired nurse and dedicated advocate who facilitates peer support networks for people living with MS across Tamworth and western NSW. Her work in creating emotional and practical support networks, along with her fundraising efforts, has had a lasting impact on the MS community.

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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.