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# Newcastle Researcher Honoured with National MS Research Award

**4 FEBRUARY 2025:** Newcastle's Professor Jeannette Lechner-Scott, an internationally recognised neurologist and leader in multiple sclerosis (MS) research and clinical care, has been awarded the 2024 MS Research Award by MS Australia.

This prestigious award recognises researchers advancing our understanding of MS and driving progress toward better treatments, prevention, and a cure.

MS Australia CEO Rohan Greenland lauded Prof Lechner-Scott's impact, highlighting her pivotal role in shaping MS research and improving care for people living with the disease.

"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.

"Professor Lechner-Scott is a powerhouse in MS research and has been instrumental in advancing treatment options, expanding our understanding of MS, and improving patient care. Her leadership has propelled the field forward, and her impact is felt not just in Australia, but globally."

For Prof Lechner-Scott, improving the lives of people with MS has been a lifelong mission.

Her work at John Hunter Hospital, the University of Newcastle and the Hunter Medical Research Institute, has shaped both the scientific and clinical landscapes of MS treatment.

"I've been working with people who have MS since the early 1990s. I've seen how tough this disease can be," Prof Lechner-Scott said.

"However, new, highly effective treatments have given people hope that they can live a normal life with MS. Even so, there's still no cure, and many challenges remain."

Prof Lechner-Scott is well known for her collaborative approach, working closely with researchers, clinicians, and institutions across Australia and around the world.

She takes immense pride in uniting experts from diverse fields to address the many challenges of MS.

"I've built an amazing team with diverse skills. In addition to clinical expertise, we have experts in epigenetics, genetics, physics, and big data analysis. Together, we've made some major breakthroughs," she explained.

Professor Lechner-Scott's research has provided vital insights into some of the most complex challenges in MS, and she is internationally recognised for uncovering how genes and the environment interact in the disease.

Another key focus of her research is the effects of pregnancy on MS, an especially important topic since three in every four Australians living with MS are women.

While it's well known that pregnancy can slow disease progression and improve symptoms, Prof Lechner-Scott is investigating why these changes occur, including studying how cells change after pregnancy and exploring the impact of fertility treatments on MS.

Beyond the lab, Prof Lechner-Scott's dual role as a practising clinician has been instrumental in translating research findings into clinical practice, profoundly improving patient outcomes and quality of life.

She established Australia's largest regional MS clinic, which gives people in remote areas access to specialised care and opportunities to participate in clinical trials.

In addition to her clinical and research work, Prof Lechner-Scott has fostered a new generation of researchers and clinicians, strengthening Australia's leadership in MS research and care.

Despite her remarkable achievements, receiving the MS Research Award was an unexpected and deeply meaningful honour.

"I grew up in Germany, where we didn't have a system of applying for awards during our careers. I always thought that people would simply recognise my achievements on their own," Prof Lechner-Scott said.

"This award feels like a reflection of that recognition. I didn't know I had been nominated, so I feel incredibly honoured to receive it."

## 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 Advocacy 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:

- **John Studdy Award: Lynda Whitton, Bunbury, WA**

Lynda has dedicated three decades to advocacy, leadership, and fundraising in the MS community. As President of the Bunbury Outreach Group and founder of the Bunbury Swim fundraising event, she has made a profound difference in Western Australia and beyond, helping to establish vital support networks and services.

- **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.