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New research commitment welcomed but Government must address neurological research funding gap

TUESDAY 7 MAY 2024: MS Australia has welcomed the Government's pledge to invest in health and medical research but is concerned that not enough attention or funding is being dedicated to neurological research.

Australia's national multiple sclerosis (MS) not-for-profit organisation says neurological conditions must be considered a major national priority for medical research and has repeated its calls for the establishment of a dedicated Neurological Research Mission.

MS Australia CEO Rohan Greenland says the 'Health Research for a Future Made in Australia' package promises to deliver a more strategic and coordinated approach to research funding.

"I'm very pleased to see the Government reaffirm its commitment to Research Missions through the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) with the establishment of two new Missions.

"Given the Government's position is to establish new missions, MS Australia will continue its calls to the Government to allocate funding to establish a MRFF Neurological Mission," Mr Greenland said.

Millions of Australians live with a progressive neurological or neuromuscular condition in Australia, with an annual cost to the Australian economy of over \$36 billion.

MS Australia President Associate Professor Des Graham says Neurological conditions must be a major national priority for medical research.

"The establishment of an MRFF Neurological Mission would assist in bringing together key researchers, health professionals, stakeholders, industry partners and patients to tackle the health challenges related to neurological conditions," Associate Professor Graham said.

Last week's Government announcement also included funding through the MRFF for CureMOG: A randomised, double-blind, placebo-controlled multicentre phase III clinical trial for the treatment of MOGAD. Myelin oligodendrocyte glycoprotein antibody-associated disease (MOGAD) is an inflammatory demyelinating disorder affecting the brain and spinal cord. MOGAD is an MSrelated condition which can sometimes be confused for MS. MS Australia was a partner on this application, which received \$2,806,584. The trial is being led by Associate Professor Sudarshini Ramanathan from The University of Sydney.



MS Australia would also like to congratulate Dr Izanne Roos, The University of Melbourne, who was awarded an NHMRC Investigator Grant of \$647,400. Her project is focusing on the evidence-based use of high-efficacy therapies in MS. Dr Roos is currently receiving an MS Australia fellowship focused on <u>preventing</u> disability in people with severe forms of MS.

Mr Greenland welcomed that investment and acknowledged a previous \$18 million Commonwealth Government investment into Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) research.

\$18 million was allocated from the MRFF in the 2022-2023 budget to bolster research efforts focused on MS, to help provide access to clinical trials and accelerate the availability of effective therapeutics for the treatment of the EBV, an MS risk factor.

MS Australia partnered with Australian research teams in five successful bids for this government funding, totaling almost \$10 million.

Part of this research will take advantage of large collections of biological samples and clinical information collected over many years within <u>MS Australia's National</u> <u>Collaborative Research Platforms</u>.

Mr Greenland says MS Australia acknowledges and highly values the Commonwealth Government's significant investment into EBV research.

"MS Australia is working closely with outstanding Australian researchers to ensure this investment is maximised to fast-track answers that will lead to better outcomes for the MS community," Mr Greenland said.

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About MS

MEDIA RELEASE



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.