MS Australia Launches Major EBV Research Platform to Combat MS

29 NOVEMBER 2024: MS Australia is bringing together the nation's top researchers to unlock the complex link between Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) and multiple sclerosis (MS); with the potential to revolutionise how we treat, prevent, and ultimately cure MS.

The EBV in MS National Collaborative Platform, launched today at MS Australia's inaugural *Frontiers in MS Research Symposium* at the University of Sydney, aims to unify and strengthen Australian research efforts into EBV and MS.

EBV is one of the most widespread viruses globally, with around 90 per cent of adults infected.

This common virus can cause glandular fever, but many people experience mild or no symptoms and may never realise they carry it.

However, EBV infection increases the risk of developing MS, with virtually all people diagnosed with MS having a history of EBV and investigating this link has become one of the most promising areas of MS research.

MS Australia's Head of Research, Dr Julia Morahan says landmark discoveries in 2022 provided compelling evidence that EBV is necessary for the development of MS.

“The immune response to EBV might set the stage for immune attack on the brain and spinal cord in MS,” Dr Morahan said.

The new Platform brings together researchers, resources, and diverse expertise across Australia.

Dr Morahan says that by consolidating research efforts, it is hoped to accelerate discoveries into the role of EBV in MS.

“Together we are investigating innovative treatments and the development of vaccines, with the ultimate hope that this effort brings us closer to the goal of preventing MS," Dr Morahan said.

A key component of the Platform is the national EBV in MS Working Group, a team of over 30 clinical and academic researchers working on MS Australia-funded projects, government initiatives, and other EBV-focused research.

The Working Group will collaborate on national clinical trials and fundamental research, consolidate novel research findings and global developments, and develop a national MS EBV biobank to support new discoveries.

The new Platform exemplifies the collaborative spirit of MS Australia's research symposium, *Frontiers in MS Research*, held in partnership with the University of Sydney's Brain and Mind Centre.

Professor Michael Barnett, an MS neurologist and researcher at the Brain and Mind Centre, highlighted the alignment of the Symposium's themes with the Centre's mission to improve brain health outcomes.

Professor Barnett says that while preventing MS is one of the ultimate goals, until we achieve this, there is so much to be gained from earlier detection of MS and early intervention.

“In MS we say “time is tissue”: the earlier we treat; the more damage can be prevented and disability delayed.

"We are delighted to partner with MS Australia in this Symposium, sharing cutting-edge MS research towards improving lives of people with MS," Professor Barnett said.

F*rontiers in MS* brings together leading researchers from Australia and internationally, people living with MS, carers and clinicians to share the latest in earlier detection and intervention and the path to ultimately preventing MS.

A highlight of the event is the international keynote address by Dr Ruth Ann Marrie, renowned Professor of Medicine and Multiple Sclerosis Clinical Research Chair at Dalhousie University in Canada.

In 2023, Dr Marrie received the prestigious international Barancik Prize for Innovation in MS Research.

Aligned to the global *Pathways to Cures* research strategy in MS, the event will focus on all aspects of MS prevention, from stopping the disease before it starts, to improving symptom management to enhance the quality of life.

The EBV in MS National Collaborative Platform and *Frontiers in MS Research Symposium* showcases MS Australia's 20 years of leadership in driving MS research and collaboration.

MS Australia CEO, Rohan Greenland, says the launch of the EBV in MS National Collaborative Platform marks a pivotal step in MS Australia's mission to address the root causes of MS, to ultimately prevent its onset."

"Today's Symposium brings the MS community together to share knowledge and strengthen our collective efforts to go further and faster towards a world without MS," Mr Greenland said.

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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.