



# Empowering lives

2023 ANNUAL REPORT



## **OUR ASPIRATION**

The home of comprehensive support for neurological conditions

## **OUR PURPOSE**

Together on the journey to break down barriers, achieve goals and live well

## **OUR VALUES**

Empowerment, Community,  
Expertise, Creativity, Spirited



# Contents

<b>Message from the Chair</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Message from the CEO</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>MS Plus in numbers</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Delivering on our <i>Strategic Directions 2020–2025</i></b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Empowering positive living with MS: Lorraine’s story</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Empowering clients to live their best lives</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Empowering through education and connection</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Empowering future research and support</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Project wellbeing: Phu and Alison’s story</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Empowering care for over 65s</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Empowering our people</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Concise financials</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>MS Plus Board</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Our Board Committees, Executive Team and Senior Management Team</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Special thanks</b>	<b>33</b>

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



### Empowering lives

In launching *Strategic Directions 2020–2025*, we spoke extensively about the importance of engaging and listening, ensuring that our service response is truly person centred — recognising that every individual has unique experiences, needs and aspirations.

Our key objectives remain — to place people at the forefront of decision making and striving to create an environment that supports growth, independence and control.

There are many strategic achievements of this past year, which highlight our commitment to this approach, as the Board has progressed the delivery of our strategy through:

- the new Carers Strategy and the MS Plus Partnership Framework
- progressing the building of the MS Wellbeing Centre and Specialist Disability Accommodation Units at Lidcombe and our new Wellbeing Centres in Footscray and Hobart
- a new MS Plus Clinical Governance Framework
- re-shaping of our NDIS services to deliver stronger Coordination of Support and Plan Management Outcomes for clients

- a new Allied Health Strategy, which has seen overall expansion of services
- a work order change for Employment Support Services, to enable support of clients with acquired neurological clients
- refreshing the MS Plus Services Marketing and Fundraising Strategies, including research fundraising and enhancements of the Gift in Wills program
- delivery of our Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

The Board has also maintained a focus on ensuring that the skill set of Directors supports the delivery of its strategy. This year, both our Deputy Chair, Karen Hayes and Scott McCorkell will complete their terms as Directors of MS Plus, and we thank them both for the very significant contribution they have made. Planning for their succession and fulfillment of a vacancy following the retirement of Chris Gillies in 2020, has been carefully considered and well-ordered. The Board has been fortunate in being able to co-opt for election Mathew Cleeve, an experienced finance professional with extensive investment experience, who had previously served as an Independent member of the Risk Audit and Finance Committee; Corinne Habel

who brings to the Board extensive experience in business development and fundraising; and Donna-Marree Vinci an accomplished IT executive and Director within the banking and finance sectors and previously an independent member of the Board Infrastructure Committee. We welcome our new Directors and I extend my thanks to all my fellow Directors and all our independent committee members for their ongoing support and commitment to our work.

As we complete the fourth year of our strategic journey, I am very proud of the progress we have made. With the benefit of a committed and talented team of staff, volunteers, donors and supporters, we continue to strive to find innovative solutions, tailored to meet the unique needs of each individual and by embracing creativity, we continue to unlock new possibilities and open doors to a brighter future.

**Garry Whatley**  
Chairman

### Achieving aspirations

This year's annual report is centred around our unwavering commitment to empowering lives. By every measure our success lies in our ability to positively impact the lives of our staff, volunteers, donors and supporters, to enable the achievement of better outcomes for the individuals in the communities we serve.

We continue to place strong emphasis on empowering our employees, recognising them as our most valuable asset. The Executive team has worked hard to foster a culture of growth, continuous learning, and inclusivity, providing the team with the tools and support needed to thrive both personally and professionally.

Beyond our immediate walls, we have actively sought opportunities to empower individuals in the communities where we operate. Through strategic partnerships and service enhancements and initiatives, we continue to make significant strides in creating positive change, enabling our clients realise their aspirations.

Key operational highlights have included:

- our successful three-year NDIS Accreditation

- the successful re-tender of our Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme (ACVVS)
- the implementation of the redesign of our intake services, Plus Connect, reflecting our vision and commitment to a person-centred organisation
- despite an increasingly challenging economic environment and the legacy of COVID, the fundraising programs, in particular our gifts in wills, trusts and foundations and our appeals program performed strongly. Similarly, our increasingly popular MS Walk Run Roll events in Sydney, Canberra, Launceston and Melbourne were also a great success
- the introduction of our Key Workers, to act as trusted partners to our clients, connecting with and continuing to be the single point of contact for them during their journey with MS Plus
- increased the service offering extending to dietetics and fee for service programs through aged care funding, Medicare, and private health funds
- significant growth in demand for our Plan Management service demonstrates our commitment to providing exceptional service and support

- introduction of Performance and People into the NDIS team to support and improve staff engagement.

In line with our commitment to empowerment, we have also prioritised diversity and inclusion across the organisation. At MS Plus, we know that embracing individuals from all backgrounds, perspectives and experiences means we can foster an environment of creativity and collaboration, leading to better solutions and a stronger sense of unity.

Looking ahead, we remain steadfast in our dedication to empowering lives. We will continue to invest in our people and nurture our relationships with communities, in keeping with our values. Together, we can create a future where empowerment knows no bounds and individuals can reach their fullest potential.

My thanks to the Board for its stewardship and support of our team. The strong focus on clients as part of our governance, demonstrates the unwavering commitment to upholding our values and sets the foundation for our success.

**John Blewonski**  
Chief Executive Officer

## MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



## MS Plus in numbers

Plus exercise physiologists provided **8,953** hours of support

Plus Continence support provided by Clinical Nurses: **623** hours

**1,903** people generously volunteer their time to support MS Plus

**930** event volunteers donated **4,530** hours of their time to MS Plus

**126,630** hours of care provided through Plus Residential and Plus Respite services at Beverly Hills in New South Wales, and Watsonia and Williamstown in Victoria

MS Plus Community Shops' **294** volunteers, welcomed **23,011** items.

**29.9k** followers across Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn

**630** people provided with employment support

**229,286** NDIS services delivered (across all services)



**52,878** hours  
of Plus Support  
Coordination provided

MS Plus employs **339**  
full time, part time and  
casual staff

**220** Plus Peer Support volunteers, connecting  
over **1,143** people and providing approximately  
**2,712** hours of monthly support

Total event  
fundraising:  
**\$6,673,998**

Plus Advisor nurses and  
social workers provided  
support to **1,203** clients

**16,328** connections  
through Plus Connect

**1,778** registrations for  
an educational webinar

MS Virtual Art Show 2023  
received submissions from  
**171** artists

**50,975** people  
participated in an  
MS Plus event



# Delivering on our *Strategic Directions 2020–2025*

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## YEAR THREE

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### About *Strategic Directions 2020–2025*

MS Plus *Strategic Directions 2020–2025* is about meeting the evolving needs of people living with multiple sclerosis and other neurological conditions, now and in the future. In the past year we continued to reshape our service delivery to empower neuro wellbeing and connections, all within our changing environment. The strategy remains underpinned by our four Strategic Pillars: Person-centred, Virtual and Physical Hubs, Partnerships and Growth.

### Achievements in FY 2022–2023

#### Person-centred

- launching of Plus Connect: the new ‘front-end’ for access to MS Plus services, supported by plans for our new ‘Key Worker’ roles
- delivery of an Outcomes Measurement/Social Impact Framework
- implementation of our Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

#### Virtual and Physical Hubs

- securing the Planning permission and appointing a builder to commence development of the new Wellbeing Centre and Specialist Disability Accommodation facilities at Lidcombe
- advancing construction of our wellbeing centres in Footscray, Lidcombe and Hobart.
- advancing construction of SDA units at Lidcombe.

#### Partnerships

- delivering a Partnership Framework to support identifying, engagement, and measurement of partnership outcomes.

#### Carers

- implementation of Carers Strategy to enable holistic support for all clients.

#### Growth

- continued expansion of our existing Allied Health, NDIS and Employment Program to support people living with neurological conditions other than MS
- expansion of service delivery to people over 65 across all MS Plus jurisdictions; and delivery of Allied Health to Nursing Port Stephens
- implementation of the new Clinical Governance, and Investment Strategies.

#### Year Four: What’s next?

FY 2023–2024 will be another significant year for MS Plus, with lots happening including:

- further expansion of services to support people living with other neurological conditions
- opening of both the Hobart and Lidcombe Wellbeing Centres
- opening of the Lidcombe Specialist Disability Accommodation
- delivery of the new data management framework
- delivery of a new 3-year Fundraising Strategy
- establishment of Consumer Advisory Panel to support Seniors Wellbeing.

# Empowering positive living with MS: Lorraine's story



**Diagnosed with Primary Progressive MS a few years ago, Lorraine — who also lives with fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue — says maintaining a positive mindset has helped her mental wellbeing.**

'I don't hate my MS, I'm not angry at it. No one caused this to happen, it just did. I call it my wheel of fortune, one day you wake up with one prize, then the next day another, then you

get the showcase. I think of all the stuff I did that week and think, okay I got all those things done, that's pretty good. Let's see what next week brings,' Lorraine says.

### **Staying active to live well**

Lorraine currently sees MS Plus physiotherapist, Mahendra at her home once a week and is also loving her new hydrotherapy sessions with exercise physiologist Caitlin.

'Because of hydrotherapy with Caitlin, I'm learning to push myself more during my physio.

'I can also stand up more in the water (with the rails) and Caitlin can help me more. Having the rails is great. Hydro is a great safety net to give things a go without fear of falling. The worst that can happen if I fall in the water is I get a bit wet and lose my glasses.'

### **Connecting to support**

After her initial diagnosis, Lorraine was introduced to the hospital's MS nurse. The nurse then connected Lorraine with MS Plus.

'The next week I called MS Plus and since then my life has changed for the better.'

'I was immediately put into a Peer Links video call of people newly-diagnosed with MS, so we could learn how to cope with our diagnosis, and also the knowledge we are not alone in coping with MS.

'An MS nurse also spoke with the peer group and for me it just made my life make sense,' Lorraine says.

'I have sought help from an amazing support coordinator, who helped me apply for NDIS, after spending lots of time on the phone with me over a few weeks to get my story.

'I also spoke with a wonderful social worker, who also spent a lot of time on the phone with me to get my story to apply successfully for the Disability Support Pension.

'Without the services available to me and others with MS, I wouldn't be where I am today,' Lorraine says.

### **Giving back to others with MS**

Lorraine has participated in our last two MS Walk, Run + Roll fundraising events, raising a collective \$10,800, along with family and friends.

'If it wasn't for the amazing MS Plus team, including the support

coordinator who took the time every day over many months to get my side of the story, type up my documents and help me to liaise with the right people to get onto the NDIS, I would be stuck at home and waiting for my kids to take me out somewhere.'

In 2022, Lorraine was one of 25 MS Go for Gold Scholarship recipients.

'After winning the scholarship, I was able to purchase an expensive electric craft machine that — with a push of a button — helps me to make personalised cards once again. This has made my life so much easier, happier and has brought back the joy of my hobby.

'Ultimately, I'm a person first, not just a disability. I've put a license plate on my wheelchair and walker, which makes people smile and have a laugh with me, rather than feeling sorry for me when they see me on the street. Little kids love it and I feel like people then really see me, not just my chair.'





## Empowering clients to live their best lives



**OUR TAILORED SERVICES ARE DESIGNED TO PUT CLIENTS AT THE FOREFRONT OF THEIR OWN CARE. EXPERTS IN THEIR OWN CONDITION, WE EMPOWER OUR CLIENTS TO TAKE CONTROL OF THEIR TREATMENT AND TO LIVE THE VERY BEST POSSIBLE LIFE.**



### Plus Employment Support Services

This year our Plus Employment Support Service (ESS) assisted a total of 630 clients, including:

- **42** clients were assisted in gaining employment
- **588** clients were assisted to maintain their employment
- **20,137** hours of direct service were provided

MS Plus also provided **\$1,253,288** financial assistance to clients with Employment Assistance Funding and Revenue Allocation, including:

- **705** pieces of equipment purchased to assist individuals to maintain or gain employment, with a total value of **\$500,736**.
- **\$752,522** worth of services for clients to help them stay in their current employment.

### Feel good moment



'Having progressive MS means that I am constantly having to adapt to increasing symptoms. My Occupational Therapist, Mali and the Plus Employment Support Service (Plus ESS) have been there through all the transitions, allowing me to continue my work with Guide Dogs Victoria.

'In previous years I have had great assistance with transitioning to a wheelchair and setting up a comfortable at-home work environment. This year saw me make a major move to using hand controls for my work car. Mali provided solutions and worked with other professionals and organisations making it a successful transition.

'Mali's dedication and attention to detail has provided me with solutions that I didn't know existed. I certainly trust the Plus ESS service and it is not an exaggeration to say they have kept me in the job I love.'

**Plus ESS client**

'One of the highlights of the year for me was seeing all the hard work that one of my clients has put in come to fruition and result in the client moving from a casual position to a permanent job. Having to take time off for MS treatment is no longer a burden for my client, he has better financial and job security, he is less stressed, which allows him to better manage his MS.

He is now busy saving his annual leave to take his wife and daughters to Greece and the UK for a holiday at the end of the year.'

**Gillian Kennedy**

**Plus ESS Employment Development Consultant**

Mark and his daughter





## Allied Health

**818** clients were provided with more than **14,976** hours of allied health support.

Our allied health services include Plus Occupational Therapy, Plus Physiotherapy, Plus Continence, Plus Exercise Physiology and Plus Diet and Nutrition. These services delivered an incredible volume of support to our clients throughout the year, including:

- Plus Continence total hours: **623**
- Plus Diet and Nutrition total hours: **176**
- Plus Physiotherapy total hours: **1,687**
- Plus Occupational Therapy total hours: **3,538**
- Our exercise physiologists also provided **8,953** hours of support to our clients from MS Plus gyms during the year.

**Our allied health staff also provided 272 clients with 1,590 hours of support from the comfort of their own home.**



## Plus Support Coordination

A total of **52,878** hours of support provided to clients.

Throughout the year, the Support Coordination service has diligently assisted **1,472** clients in effectively utilising their NDIS Plan funding, to work towards their individual goals. The leadership team focused on implementing recognition and retention strategies, culminating in the successful launch of the service's Recognition Program — to acknowledge the outstanding contributions of our staff, while further nurturing the already thriving team culture.

'My support coordinator looked after so many aspects of my holiday planning, from organising a support worker, to checking with my OT about what help I would require, booking accommodation, transport, hoisting support and organising it to come out of my NDIS plan.'

**Katy**



## Plus Plan Management

**31,947** invoices processed

Over the past 12 months, the Plan Management service has experienced remarkable growth, leading to the addition of a new full-time plan manager. The number of clients served has increased from 250 to 334, reflecting a significant **34 per cent** surge. Notably, this expansion aligns seamlessly with the MS Plus strategic plan, demonstrating our commitment to providing exceptional service and support.





# Empowering through education and connection



**WE ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT EMPOWERING CLIENTS WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THEY NEED TO LIVE WELL. KEY TO THIS IS CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH SERVICES AND SUPPORT WITHIN THEIR OWN COMMUNITIES.**



### Plus Connect

**16,328** connections made through Plus Connect

Our Plus Connect service is the gateway to all the other MS Plus services and providers, and a vital source of information and support for our clients. From this year, each newly-registered client is matched with their own dedicated Key Worker within the Plus Connect team, who partners with them moving forward, to ensure continuity and ease of access to MS Plus services.

**‘Your patience, extensive knowledge, and persistence guided me through this challenging time. Your dedication has made a profound impact on my journey, and I can’t thank you enough for being there every step of the way.’**

**Plus Connect client**



### Health promotion & Education

**1,778** people registered for a webinar

**Podcasts: 9,446** downloads, **7,358** unique listeners

**Client and health professional views of our on-demand YouTube webinars: 18,207**

Our Health Promotion and Wellbeing team provide regular free webinars, podcasts and other resources for people with MS and other neurological conditions.

**‘Thank you, the online Pilates program is fabulous with the varying levels — it was perfect for me to get back into exercise after COVID. I am fortunately pretty mobile and fit, so this will ease me back nicely.’**

**Pilates participant**



### Plus Advisor

**1,203** clients supported by a MS plus nurse or social worker

Our MS nurse and social work advisors provided individual support to individual clients, as well as providing education and information in group settings via our Peer Links, webinars and Peer Groups.





## MS Virtual Art Show

This year's art show featured **171** beautiful, skilful works submitted by artists who are living with MS or another neurological condition as well as carers. The artwork included paintings, illustrations, sculptures, craft, digital artwork and photography.

Following our 17-year tradition, one of the artists participating in the 2023 MS Virtual Art Show won the prestigious Barry Allen Art Award. The late Barry Allen was a man who loved painting and received great comfort from his interest in art and music. The virtual award ceremony took place on Tuesday 30 May in recognition of World MS Day.



## MS Go for Gold Scholarships

We once again had an overwhelming response to the program, which is funded by our MS Mega Challenge. We received 165 applications this year, for a variety of inspiring goals. The scholarships provide \$2,000 to 25 recipients, to help them to pursue a dream or goal that has been impeded by their MS diagnosis.



## MS Plus Ambassadors

**50** active ambassadors presented at **44** events and volunteered **194** hours of their time.

Our ambassadors are volunteers living with MS or caring for someone with MS, who educate others about the condition via corporate, school or community events.



## Plus Peer Support

**220** volunteers

**82** face to face peer groups

**22** virtual peer groups

**81** people provided with more than **500** hours of support via one-on-one phone calls

**11** Peer Link wellbeing programs, providing over **264** hours of support.

Approximately **1,143** people engage annually with Plus Peer Support.

Collectively our volunteers provided **2,712** hours of support to clients, family, friends and carers.

'Plus Peer Support is one of the best services you can offer someone with MS. You hear a lot of misinformation in the beginning and it can be quite negative. Then you speak to someone in a peer support group who was diagnosed 20 years ago, who is still quite active and doing great; it makes such a difference to your outlook.'

**Gabe**



## Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme (ACVVS)

**412** active volunteers

**480** recipients

Each year we help to recruit, train and support volunteers on behalf of the Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme (ACVVS), formerly known as the Community Visitors Scheme. The program provides vital companionship for people living in government-funded aged care homes or living in their own homes and receiving a Home Care Package and who are at risk of social isolation and loneliness and volunteers are the backbone of the program.

Increased confidence in volunteering and face to face interaction since COVID-related aged care lockdowns ended has seen the ACVVS program grow in popularity over the past 12 months.



## Family Camps

This year **20** families shared a fun few days at Callaroy Centre on the Sydney North Coast and Phillip Island in Victoria.

### Feel good moment



'Watching my children grow while challenging themselves doing the activities was wonderful. I was nervous to attend but it was worth it both personally and for my kids. It was really important for the kids to see that I am not alone and that MS is something other kids help their parents with and that other mums are like me. I personally loved connecting with other mums and dads and challenging myself with the activities. Thanks so much for this opportunity. I really appreciate this opportunity to help me continue to understand my situation and know that I am not alone in this journey.'

**MS Family Camp participant**



# Empowering future research and support



**OUR EVENTS, GIFTS  
IN WILLS, APPEALS  
AND COMMUNITY  
FUNDRAISING  
ENABLES MS PLUS TO  
CONTINUE FUNDING  
BETTER TREATMENTS,  
ONGOING SERVICES AND  
RESEARCH THAT WILL  
EMPOWER PEOPLE TO  
BETTER MANAGE THEIR  
CONDITION AND ONE DAY  
MAKE MS A THING OF THE  
PAST.**



Total raised: **\$2,777,818**  
Total participants: **10,184**

The MS Gong Ride is Australia's largest fundraising recreational bike ride. The event has a long and successful history and in 2022, celebrated its 40th year, with more than 10,000 cyclists riding a total of 773,084km.

The 40th MS Gong Ride included, for the first time, a 7km All Abilities Ride starting at Nicholson Park, partnering with The Disability Trust and Cycling Ability to offer the new ride, which is expected to become a staple of future MS Gong Ride events.

'We love the iconic ride and how well organised it is. The scenery, the volunteers, the challenge. It all makes for a memorable experience and has had us coming back year on year since 2006... and it ain't looking like we'll stop any time soon!'

**Kim**



Total raised: **\$465,610**  
Total participants: **1,579**

The MS Mega Challenge is one of Australia's most popular and fastest growing fundraising events. Through team relay sports and personal recreational challenges, the MS Mega Challenge raises vital funds to support people living with MS.

Since its founding in 2001, the program has expanded to swims across ACT, NSW, VIC and TAS and includes other sports and recreational pursuits, including squash, racquetball, triathlon and badminton. Funds raised from MS Mega Challenge events contribute to MS Go For Gold Scholarships, Financial Assistance Programs and providing services to directly benefit people living with MS.



Total raised: **\$1,201,315**  
Total participants: **7,871**

This annual charity event is an opportunity to raise vital funds for people living with MS. Participants can Walk, Run or Roll their way through fully accessible courses. During the 2023 event, participants completed a total of **50,358km** during the four events held across Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra and Launceston.





Total raised: **\$1,769,432**  
Total participants: **30,737**

MS Readathon marked the 45th anniversary of this iconic event in 2022, with children across Australia reading an impressive **260,000** books. In 2022, we partnered with Pan Macmillan to give away **5,000** limited edition MS Readathon versions of the 13-Storey-Treehouse book to people who made a self-donation of \$25 or more.

Our partnership with Big 4 Caravan Parks also allowed us to give away 16 cabin stays to participants who fundraised and provided two-dollar match days throughout the campaign. These fundraising challenges resulted in huge engagement boosts for the campaign and over **\$300,000** in donations.



Total raised: **\$3,366,427**  
Total participants: **12,941**

Each year The May 50K supports people to walk, run or move 50 km, 100 km or 150 km to raise funds for life saving MS research. MS Plus runs the event on behalf of MS Australia.

This year, our **12,941** participants included **1,311** teams and **300** organisations who took part in the fundraiser.

do it for **MS**

Total raised: **\$459,913**  
Total participants: **604**

Every year hundreds of fundraisers find new and exciting ways to raise money for MS within their communities. Over the last year we've had fundraisers trek, cut their hair, decorate their house with Christmas lights, and even use a gumball machine. In May 2023, 11 Trekkers spent seven days in the gorgeous Ikara-Flinders Ranges experiencing the geological grandeur forged more than 540 million years ago. Together they raised an incredible **\$51,000**.

'Participating in the Ikara-Flinders Ranges Adventure was an amazing experience. From excellent support in the lead up, to great organisation an informative, friendly local guides we were well looked after for every aspect of our trip. I would do it again in a heartbeat!'

**Kelly**



## MS Plus Community Shops

Our **294** community shop volunteers sorted more than **23,000** donated items, raising **\$2,200,000**

Our MS Plus community shops are an important donated revenue source for MS Plus, while also providing a much-loved source of connection for the communities they operate within.

### Feel good moment



‘Whilst volunteering in the MS Plus Community Shop in Mildura, I have had many opportunities to offer compassion, kindness and often a hug to people when they donate items of a deceased family member. I always take the time to listen to their stories of loved ones and put myself in their shoes. Sharing part of their story of an item with a customer who is purchasing is rewarding.’

**Shop volunteer, Margaret Storck**

## MS Plus Future Planning

Total raised: **\$3,500,000**  
Total Estates/Trusts: **66**

Heartfelt thanks go to all our late donors, who generously left a legacy of love in their Wills to MS Plus this year. Thanks also goes to all members of the MS Callistemon League for their thoughtful support and ongoing commitment.

When supporters leave a gift in their Will, they automatically join the MS Callistemon League, making a promise to the future. Through this commitment, they are ensuring we can plan for and provide the vital support services and funding for the research breakthroughs of the future. Ensuring that when a cure is in sight, we can fast track it.

The MS Callistemon League is a passionate community, committed to the dreams, hopes and visions of those living with MS and we thank them for being there with them on their MS journey.



Nigel and wife Stevie

**‘A gift in my Will is a logical extension of my MS Ambassador role. It will help keep my work going after I’m gone. It’s important to help fund research that will lead to better treatments.’**

**The current drugs have unpleasant side effects. It would be great to have better ones available. A cure would be even better. It might not be there in time to help me, but if my gift can help others receive a cure, that’s a good thing in my book.’**

**Nigel**



## Our commitment to funding research

**\$1,000,000**

Contributed to MS research

Every day, research brings us closer to finding new ways to prevent, treat and cure MS. Loyal and generous individual givers, enabled MS Plus to contribute **\$1,000,000** last year towards accelerating cutting edge MS research through MS Australia's research program. The program supports research activity in areas where Australian scientists will have the greatest impact on MS research worldwide, through funding investigator-led projects like:

- Postdoctoral Fellowship, Dr Nicholas Blackburn (TAS), **How does genetic variation contribute to multiple sclerosis?**
- Incubator Grant, Dr Jennifer Massey (NSW), **Does stem cell transplant deplete EBV reservoirs in MS?**

- Project Grant, Associate Professor Justin Rubio (VIC), **The impact of inflammation on DNA damage in brain cells in primary progressive MS.**
- Postdoctoral Fellowship, Ms Alice Saul (TAS), **The role of pain in multiple sclerosis.**



Dr Jennifer Massey



**\$2,457,002** raised  
**245,393** tickets purchased

The MS Dream Car Lottery and the MS Dream Raffle programs were well-supported this year, with **245,393** tickets purchased. Despite increasing market uncertainties and financial pressures, our committed ticket purchasers continued to buy tickets, knowing that they were supporting both the care and wellbeing of people living with MS and contributing to fund vital medical research aimed at improving treatments for MS and ultimately, finding a cure”.

Special thanks to our loyal MS Dream Club members who are a community of committed regular supporters, whose kindness and generosity is giving hope for the future.



## MS Giving

**Total raised: \$1,295,462**  
**Total gifts: 12,711**

MS Plus supporters know that everyone deserves the opportunity to dream, to imagine and to create the life they want. Their gifts contribute to funding medical research and vital support services, that enable people living with MS to do just that.

This year, MS Giving saw the strongest net surplus delivered to date, helped by a strong response to the largest appeal of the year, the Tax Appeal, where **3,000** donors gave on average 22% more, contributing to the total of **\$540,780** raised. For the first time, supporters were invited to join **‘Project Wellbeing’** and be part of the building and expansion of the MS Plus Wellbeing Centres in NSW, TAS and VIC. These cutting-edge Wellbeing Centres will ensure people with MS have access to vital allied health specialists, such as neuro-trained physiotherapists, speech therapists and dietitians; help navigating the NDIS; access to education, mental health, peer and employment support programs and much more.



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**‘Thank you for your support. It could change my life and ensure tomorrow will be better than today for me and my daughters. Your kindness gives me hope for the future. Hope that research will continue to deliver better treatments for me and my sister and our mother.’**

**Bronwyn**

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## Project Wellbeing Phu and Alison's story

**Dr Phu Hoang has been working continuously as a researcher and clinician in MS rehabilitation for the last 21 years.**

His focus is on clinical trials to address unanswered questions in MS, and to restore mobility to people living with MS.

'I've witnessed incredible results at the MS Plus centre in Lidcombe, NSW. Many of my patients have improved their MS symptoms, including Alison, who can now walk up to four kilometres at a time unassisted.'

Before Alison arrived, she was told that she simply wouldn't improve.

'Before I started my rehabilitation, I had lost use of my left arm and hand, and it was nearly impossible to lift my left leg. This all made my balance terrible. I had to use a walker to get around and I still fell with that, too,' Alison says.

'After two years of treatment with Dr Hoang at the Centre, my MS symptoms have improved in ways I could have only dreamed.

Phu says, 'My research at the MS Plus Wellbeing Centre focuses on

mobility loss. It's one of the most devastating and common issues for people living with MS. I've discovered the muscle weakness that causes this problem has a pattern, but nobody has really addressed this in research before.'

This year, our Appeals team launched Project Wellbeing, to help raise funds for future Wellbeing Centres. The Wellbeing Centres are a crucial component of our vision to provide a safe and supportive environment for individuals living with MS. Thanks to our generous donors, Project Wellbeing will allow us to build and expand our rehabilitation facilities, offering the latest equipment and the best care to those with MS, as well as enabling more cutting-edge research.

Alison says, 'If you'd have seen me at my first assessment at the Centre, attempting a simple exercise that a toddler could manage, and sobbing uncontrollably because I couldn't do it, you would not believe where I am at today.'



Alison and Dr Phu

## Empowering care for over 65s



**In February 2022, MS Plus formalised the purchase of Nursing Port Stephens (NPS) — operating as Care for You at Home — and began the process of transitioning the business into the MS Plus family.**

**Care for You at Home is a trusted provider of professional care to NDIS participants, veterans, seniors and others in their homes and in the community, throughout Port Stephens, Newcastle, Maitland, Dungog and the Mid-North Coast areas.**

The acquisition of Care for You at Home provided MS Plus with aged care provider status, supporting our strategic goal to provide services to those aged over 65 who are unable to access the NDIS.

Throughout FY 2022–23, Care for You at Home has undergone significant changes, with updates to their IT systems and hardware, reviews of their policies and practices and staffing changes with the departure of the previous owner and Director of Nursing.

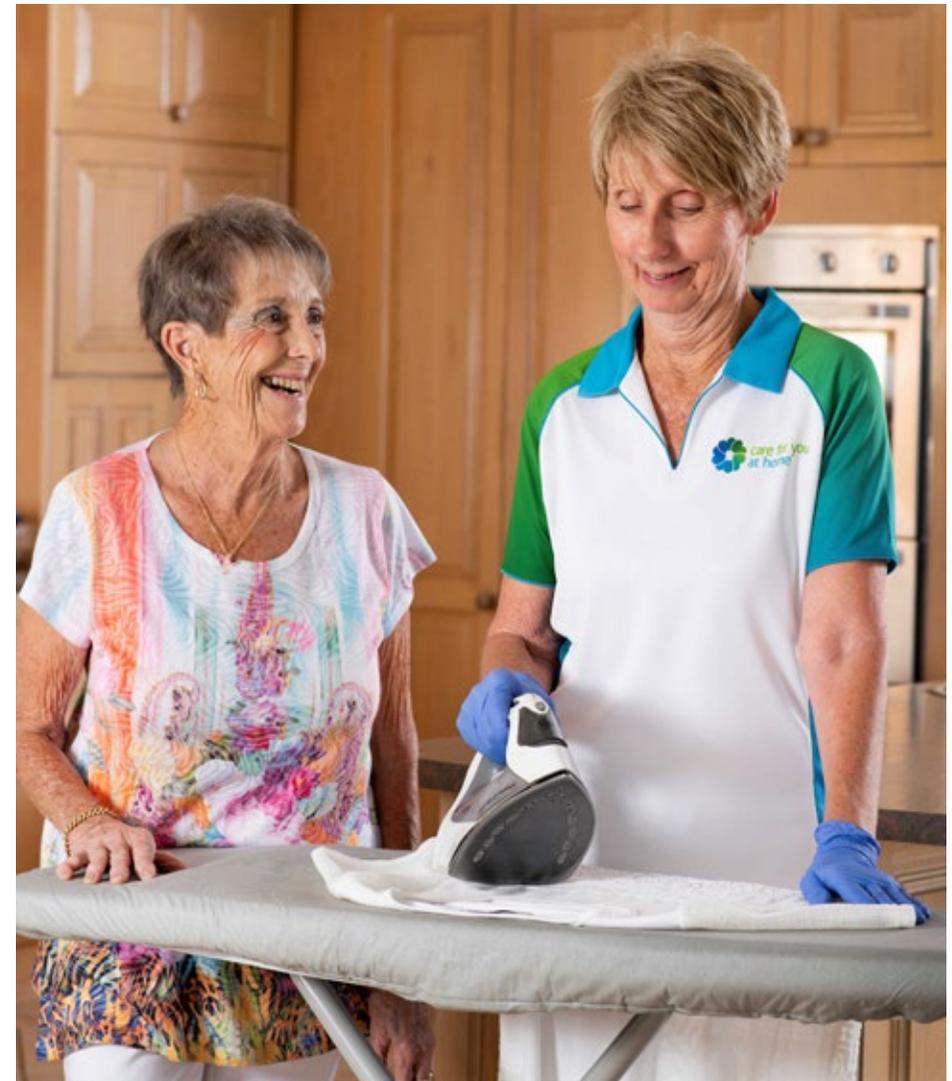
Care for You at Home also completed the process of NDIS Accreditation and ISO Quality Management

certification. MS Plus also guided Care for You at Home through the recent aged care reforms implemented by the federal government, including mandatory changes to fee schedules, incident management processes, governance responsibilities and reporting requirements.

Amongst all this change, Care for You at Home has continued to provide quality services and clinical care to their clients across its homecare, veteran, NDIS and brokered programs.

The future looks bright for Care for You at Home, with its homecare program continuing to grow. Plans are also underway for Care for You at Home to collaborate with the MS Plus allied health service, to deliver age-specific programs that will benefit the local community, as well as provide a blueprint for MS Plus to use in its Wellbeing Centres.

Care for You at Home employs **25** staff, delivering more than **28,000** hours of care and support annually.





## Empowering our people

**WE MOTIVATE AND EMPOWER OUR STAFF THROUGH WELLBEING PROJECTS, REWARD AND RECOGNITION PROGRAMS, STRONG POLICIES AND IMPROVED COMMUNICATION. EMPOWERING OUR STAFF TO BE THEIR BEST ENABLES US TO PROVIDE THE HIGHEST QUALITY CARE AND SUPPORT TO OUR CLIENTS.**

Supporting staff to be their best in FY 2022–2023:

- The Employee Assistance Program app was rolled out, enabling staff to book appointments online as well as providing access to many health and wellbeing articles on sleep, nutrition, exercise and general wellbeing. Having access to the app means staff and managers do not need to find a phone number to call, nor engage

with someone on the phone at a time when they do not feel comfortable doing so.

- A Self-care and Recovery webinar was organised for those staff who consistently manage difficult and challenging calls from clients. Positive feedback was received by attendees on the presentation and support materials provided.
- We also introduced Suicide Prevention Training to our online learning system. The module is designed to help staff to identify individuals who may be experiencing thoughts of suicide, how to ask questions about suicidal thoughts and how to refer them to support and safety.

### Our diversity and inclusion vision

We launched our Diversity and Inclusion Strategy this year, along with the establishment of employee and client Diversity and Inclusion Committees. The committees include representation from a passionate and informed group of people with the purpose of raising awareness, providing education and support for our many diverse communities.

Our aim is to better position MS Plus as an inclusive organisation where respect is fundamental to everything we do for our clients, volunteers and employees. As such we will continue to recognise, value and celebrate the different experiences, attributes, skills and perspectives that combine to make us successful health service provider.



### Annual Awards

Each year, the MS Plus Excellence Awards recognise staff achievement across the organisation. Colleagues nominate one another to celebrate significant contributions to our clients' quality of life and to the organisation.

### Chairman's Travelling Scholar Award

The Chairman's Travelling Scholar Award rewards one outstanding member of staff each year with a **\$10,000** contribution towards a period of travel and study.

**Winner: Caitlin Ireland**, who used the funds to attend the Healthcare Analytics Summit 2023 in Salt Lake City.

### Creativity award

**Winner: Michael Klinakis**, Website and Platforms Manager

### Empowerment award

**Winner: Pek Yin Ong**, Program Support Officer, Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme

### Expert Team award

**Winner:** Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme volunteers

### Community award

**Winner: Gillian Kennedy**, Employment Development Consultant

### Spirited award

**Winner: Robyn Shuttleworth**, Volunteer Specialist

### Outstanding volunteer award

**Winner: LE Ohman**



## Concise financials

### Growth in direct service delivery to people living with MS

Direct service delivery includes those activities undertaken by the Group that delivers a service to people affected by MS or other neurological conditions and are primarily funded by fee-for-service arrangements or government grants. Over recent years, the funding environment has changed significantly through the introduction of the NDIS.

The Group's NDIS service offerings include Support Coordination, Allied Health, Plan Management, Supported Independent Living and Specialised Disability Accommodation. Employment Support Services are government funded through the Disability Employment Scheme.

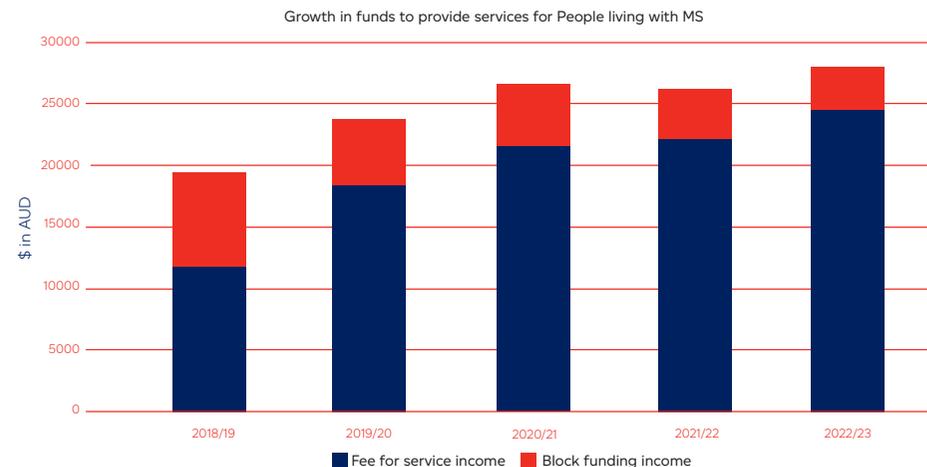
In 2022, the MS Plus Group acquired Nursing Port Stephens, providing private nursing, personal care and domestic assistance to clients in the home and community. The acquisition allows MS Plus to operate in the

private home care and aged care sectors.

The continued growth in service delivery funded by fee-for-service arrangements reflects the Group's continued investment in the scale of these NDIS services.

The reduction in block funding has continued during the transition to NDIS. In the early half of 2021–2022, the Omicron wave impacted face to face service delivery, which impacted revenue for our wellbeing centres and allied health services.

The chart adjacent highlights the five-year growth in funds available for MS Plus to provide direct services to people affected by MS or other neurological conditions. Government block funding excludes JobKeeper payments received in 2019-20 and 2020-21.



### MS Plus Ltd sources and uses of funds

The information presented below is intended to answer common questions about MS Plus' financial performance.

#### Summary Financial Performance

##### Actual Financial Performance (\$'000)

	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
MS Plus total income	48,591	44,096	58,236	52,401	52,730
MS Plus net surplus/(deficit)	2,180	(5,830)	9,396	1,089	(3,472)
Group entity impacts	589	117	99	(28)	7,079
Consolidated net surplus/deficit	2,770	(5,713)	9,495	1,061	3,607



## Concise financials

### Fundraising to support people living with MS

**MS Plus benefits from its fundraising program, which supports the provision of those activities valued by its clients, but which cannot be funded by fee-for-service or other sources.**

The financial year ended 30 June 2023 was once again challenging in the fundraising space, with a 'hangover' of instability and unpredictability from the COVID years affecting MS Plus' ability to accurately predict donor behaviour. Economic uncertainty in the community, driven by multiple interest rate rises and inflation, also undermined donor confidence.

Despite this unstable environment, the confidence of the team in delivering high quality programs was unaffected and MS Plus' program of fundraising activities went ahead more or less as planned.

MS Plus' cash giving appeals enjoyed a strong result and the group saw growth in both the size of gifts and the number of higher-level donors. The Gifts in Wills team met all their future growth Key Performance Indicators, such as new leads and confirmed benefactors, whilst also exceeding budget by around 80%. MS Dream Car Lotteries started the year well with two sold out lotteries and then suffered a drop in sales for the following two campaigns, consistent with the experience of MS organisations nationally.

Including non-operating income from Gifts in Wills, the net result was significantly better than budgeted at \$4.2 million versus a budget of \$2.3 million – an improvement of \$1.9 million. In 2022-23, MS Plus received \$3.5 million in Gifts in Wills.

MS Plus' core fundraising activities struggled during the year, with events generating a net profit of \$896,000 versus a budget of \$1.6 million, mainly caused by fundraising for the Gong Ride being taken up during the two previous COVID years, the underperformance of the Melbourne Run Ride Festival and weak results from some MS Mega Challenge events. Individual Giving (excluding Gifts in Wills) also missed its budget, delivering \$230,000 versus a budget of \$390,000.

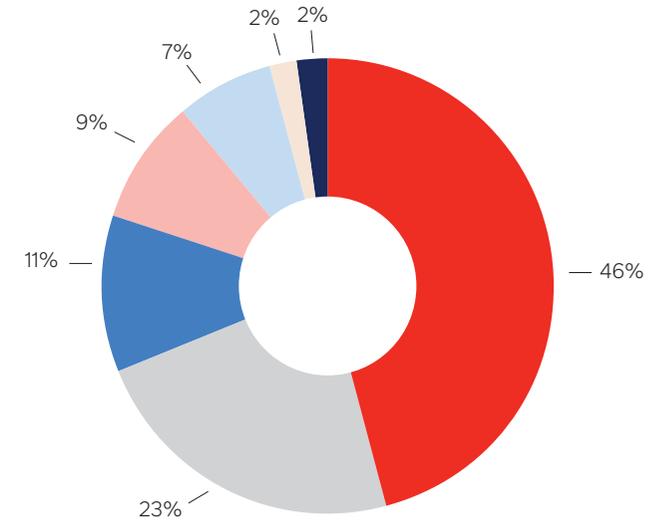
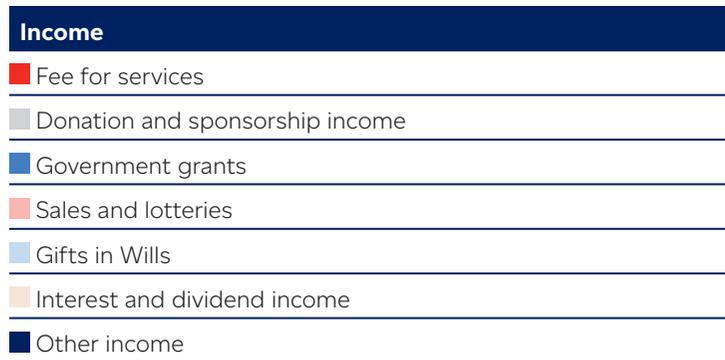
Trusts & Foundations grants exceeded the net profit target (up by \$256,000) as did MS Community Shops (up by \$302,000).

Fundraising for research was close to budget, but also suffered from some instability, principally affecting The May 50K, which was down by \$870,000 at \$1.5 million.

Overall, the year illustrates the importance of focussing on improving the return from our core activities, whilst continuing to invest in stronger growth areas.

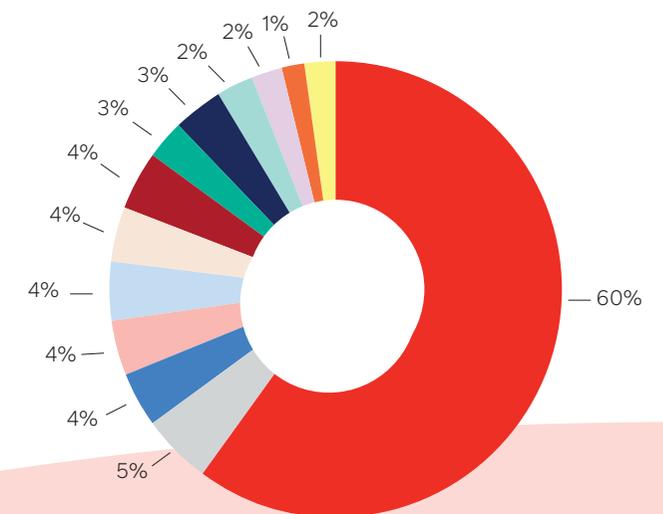
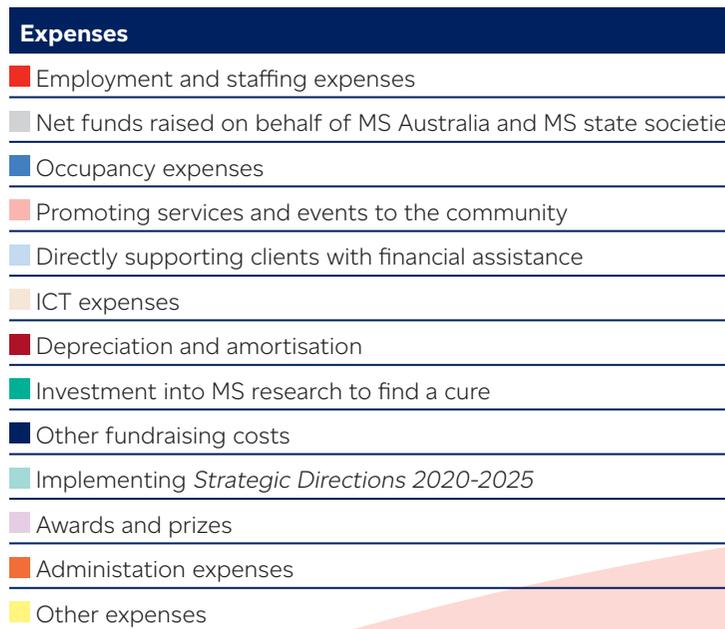
## Where the money comes from

MS Plus relies on a broad range of funding sources to deliver its support for people living with MS. In total, MS Plus Group generated **\$53.5m** in revenue for the year (2022: **\$46.8m**). This income comes from government, fee for services and MS Plus' investment and fundraising activities. The chart opposite shows where the Group derived its income during the 2023 financial year.



## How the money was spent

The chart opposite shows how the total expenditure for the 2023 financial year was allocated between the various activities undertaken by MS Plus Group.



## MS Plus Ltd and its controlled entities

Consolidated statement of surplus or deficit and other comprehensive income

As at 30 June 2023

## MS Plus Ltd and its controlled entities

Consolidated statement of financial position

As at 30 June 2023

	Consolidated	
	2023 (\$)	2022 (\$)
<b>Assets</b>		
Current assets	21,859,545	16,746,027
Non-current assets	40,056,295	42,989,337
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>61,915,840</b>	<b>59,735,364</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>		
Current liabilities	12,473,912	13,718,679
Non-current liabilities	2,955,791	2,300,082
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>15,429,703</b>	<b>16,018,761</b>
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>46,486,137</b>	<b>43,716,603</b>

	Consolidated	
	2023 (\$)	2022 (\$)
<b>Revenue</b>		
<b>Government and fee for service revenue to deliver programs for people living with MS:</b>		
Fee for services	24,805,793	22,137,213
Government grants	5,724,438	4,109,139
<b>Funds raised by MS Plus to support the delivery of valued programs not funded by Government:</b>		
Donation and sponsorship income	12,333,065	10,685,913
Sales and lotteries	5,075,399	5,271,993
Gifts in Wills	3,486,650	1,681,246
Interest and dividend income	1,027,870	1,029,428
Net gain on assets classified as fair value through profit or loss	698,976	–
Specific purpose funding	50,584	42,264
Other income	267,870	1,882,050
<b>Total revenue</b>	<b>53,470,645</b>	<b>46,839,246</b>

<b>Expenditure</b>		
Employment and staffing expenses	30,426,914	28,491,950
Net Funds raised for MS Australia and MS state societies	2,651,151	3,174,288
Occupancy expenses	2,220,947	1,433,855
Promoting services and events to the community	2,167,570	2,289,261
Directly supporting clients with financial assistance	1,916,868	1,428,207
ICT expenses	1,888,895	1,777,375
Depreciation	1,707,949	1,744,685
Investment into MS research to find a cure	1,678,889	1,660,634
Other fundraising costs	1,549,048	1,493,977
Implementing Strategic Directions 2020-2025	1,264,386	2,893,012
Awards and prizes	999,269	1,245,007
Administration expenses	744,209	974,523
Amortisation	302,167	24,500
Net loss on assets classified as fair value through profit or loss	–	3,037,635
Other expenses	1,182,849	883,065
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>50,701,111</b>	<b>52,551,974</b>
<b>Total comprehensive income / (deficit) for the year</b>	<b>2,769,534</b>	<b>(5,712,728)</b>

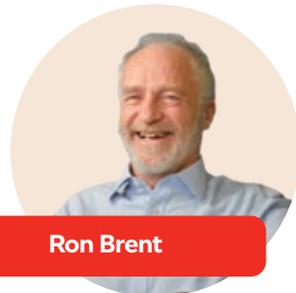
## MS PLUS BOARD



**Garry Whatley**  
MS Plus Chair



**Karen Hayes**  
Deputy Chair



**Ron Brent**



**Alison Brown**



**Sharlene Brown**



**Mathew Cleeve**



**Desmond Graham**



**Corinne Habel**



**Jeannette Lechner-Scott**



**Scott McCorkell**



**Donna-Maree Vinci**



**Adriana Zuccala**



**John Blewonski**  
Chief Executive Officer



**Kim Farrugia**  
Company Secretary

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## OUR BOARD COMMITTEES

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### Risk, Audit and Finance

Alison Brown (Chair)  
Ron Brent  
Mathew Cleeve  
Ally Long (Independent member)

### Nominations, Remuneration & Governance

Garry Whatley (Chair)  
Karen Hayes  
Peter Day (Independent Member)

### Infrastructure

Adriana Zuccala (Chair)  
Scott McCorkell  
Garry Whatley  
Donna-Maree Vinci

### Program, Policy & Practice

Des Graham (Chair)  
Jeannette Lechner-Scott

### Fundraising & Marketing

Karen Hayes (Chair)  
Scott McCorkell  
Corinne Habel  
Sharlene Brown

### Community Engagement

Sharlene Brown (Chair)  
Chairs of the local Community  
Engagement Councils

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## OUR EXECUTIVE TEAM

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### John Blewonski

Chief Executive Officer

### Kim Farrugia

Executive Officer  
& Company Secretary

### Eileen Goh

Chief Financial Officer

### Jodi Haartsen

Executive Manager Client Engagement  
& Wellbeing

### Ben Holgate

Executive Manager Strategic  
Fundraising

### Rob McClay

Executive Manager, Strategy and Client  
Impact

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## OUR SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

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### Natalie Bryant

Senior Manager Intake  
& Engagement Services

### Rhonda Cooper

Senior Manager Respite  
& Residential Services

### Sally Dale

Senior Manager People & Culture

### Elizabeth Dorizac

Senior Manager Individual Giving

### Brad Greer

Senior Manager Corporate Risk

### Greg Hutchings

Senior Manager Development, Events

### Stephen Jolly

Senior Manager Employment  
Support Services

### Ganesh Kuppa

Senior Manager Allied Health

### Peter Opie

Senior Manager ICT & Cyber Security

### Kylie Osborne

Senior Manager Community  
& Partnerships

### Herschel Parker

Senior Manager Retail Operations

### Steven Poole

Manager Property & Fleet

### Shea Shelton

Senior Manager Marketing  
& Communications

### Natalie Silvestro

Senior Manager NDIS Services

### Darren Spooner

Senior Manager Finance

# Special thanks

## STATE GOVERNMENT

The Australian Government  
 The Department of Health  
 Department of Social Services  
 National Disability Insurance Agency  
 The Australian Capital Territory Government  
 Disability ACT  
 National Capital Authority  
 The New South Wales Government  
 Department of Family & Community Services – Ageing, Disability & Home Care  
 Department of Premier & Cabinet  
 NSW Health  
 WentWest Primary Health Network  
 Western Sydney Local Health District  
 The Victorian Government  
 Department of Families, Fairness & Housing  
 The Tasmanian Government  
 Department of Health & Human Services

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

New South Wales  
 City of Paramatta  
 City of Sydney  
 Cumberland Council  
 Inner West City Council  
 Sutherland Shire  
 Wollongong City Council

### Victoria

Brimbank City Council  
 City of Casey  
 City of Greater Bendigo  
 City of Melbourne  
 City of Monash  
 City of Port Phillip  
 City of Whitehorse  
 Greater Shepparton City Council  
 Hobsons Bay City Council  
 Mildura Rural City Council  
 Yarra City Council

### Tasmania

Central Highlands Council  
 Circular Head Council  
 City of Hobart  
 City of Launceston  
 Kingborough Council

### Our Patrons

Her Excellency the Honourable Linda Dessau AM — Governor of Victoria

The Honourable Margaret Beazley AO KC — Governor of New South Wales and Mr Dennis Wilson

### Our Research Partnerships

Menzies Institute for Medical Research University of Tasmania  
 University of Melbourne  
 Monash University  
 University of Wollongong

### Our Service and Education Partnerships

Westmead MS and Neuroimmunology Clinic  
 Melbourne Health Neuroimmunology Clinic  
 Alfred Health MS and Neuroimmunology (MSNI) Unit  
 John Hunter Hospital MS Service New Castle  
 Royal Hobart MS Clinic  
 Focussed Health Psychology

### Our Media Partners

ABC News 24  
 APN News and Media  
 ATN, Australian Traffic Network  
 Café Media  
 Donor Republic  
 Exuberance  
 Free PR

i98 Radio  
 Marlin  
 MCN Multi Channel Network  
 MSWA  
 Network Ten  
 Port Melbourne Football Club  
 SBS  
 SKY  
 The Brand Agency  
 The Reputation Group  
 Homemade Digital  
 Bossman Media

### Our Event Partners

Altona Badminton Centre  
 Australian Capital Authority  
 Badminton Victoria  
 Bicycle Superstore  
 Brooks  
 City of Melbourne  
 City of Sydney  
 City of NSW  
 Destination Wollongong  
 Doone Kennedy Aquatic Centre  
 Dreampool Productions  
 Funky Trunks  
 GTR Events  
 Hillbrick Bicycles  
 Kiwanis Australia  
 Lend Lease  
 Let's Go Motorhomes  
 Lions Club

Lowrance  
 Maccabi Australia  
 Melbourne Marine Centre  
 Mitchelton  
 Nautilus Marine Insurance  
 New South Wales Institute of Sport – Cycling Program  
 NSW Police  
 Parks Victoria  
 Phill Bates  
 Porter Davis Homes  
 Property NSW  
 Rex Hunt Fishing Adventures  
 Rotary  
 Soulful Concepts  
 Squash and Racquetball Victoria  
 Sydney Olympic Park Aquatic Centre  
 Telwater (Stacer, Mercury)  
 Transport for NSW  
 Transport Sydney Trains  
 UniActive  
 University of Wollongong  
 VicRoads  
 Victoria Racing Club Ltd  
 Victorian Fisheries Authority  
 Weblease  
 Westerfolds Sport Centre  
 Wodonga Squash & Racquetball Club  
 YMCA NSW

## Our Benefactors

We received loving gifts from 66 Estates / Trusts that have contributed to the impact of our work over the past year. Of our Benefactors, 41 have chosen to remain anonymous and of our Trust donors, 4 have also chosen to remain anonymous.

Below is a list of those who chose to be identified but we honour and recognise all those who generously supported our goal to fast track a cure and provide vital care for people living with MS.

- Brenda Jean Inwards
- Christopher “Narra” Lalor
- Eleanor Mary Trethewie
- Gillian Jennifer Marie Dalton
- Gwenneth Gray
- Marjorie Inglis Lander
- Walter and Eleanor McRobie
- Shirley Joan Latimer

## Bequest Trusts and Foundations (18 in total)

- Doris Thelma Rowe Charitable trust, managed by Equity Trustees
- Elsie Louse Thomas Memorial fund (The), managed by Equity Trustees

- Heather Margaret Ryan Charitable Fund
- Josephine Heather Margaret Ryan Charitable Fund
- Joe White Bequest
- Joyce Adelaide Healey Charitable Trust Fund, managed by Equity Trustees
- Margaret Patterson Charitable Trust

And State Trustee Australia Foundations including:

- Edith Helen Sedlar
- Ellen Jean Matthews
- Harry Schofield
- Phyllis Holman
- Shields Family Charitable Endowments
- Thomas Henry And Marjorie Betty Barnard Donation
- William Arthur Shipperlee
- Arthur and Doris Clayton Fund, managed by Equity Trustees
- Grace and Herbert Foulkes Charitable Trust

## The will to help

Elizabeth Meredith always wanted to make life better for other people.

That is why she became a medical scientist and educator. **But her interest in MS became personal when her daughter developed the neurological condition 30 years ago.**

‘The whole family became involved,’ recalled Elizabeth. Bill, her beloved late husband, became a volunteer, involved in helping patients. The grandchildren participated in the MS Readathon, and other family members supported MS events.

When Bill died, donations to the MS Society (now MS Plus) were encouraged.

Across the years, Elizabeth met and kept in touch with many of the scholarship winners, whose interests ranged from opera [lessons to regain her voice] to one with his own jazz band [creating their own CD].

**More recently, Elizabeth decided to make a difference beyond her lifetime.**

The Melbourne retiree was inspired to leave a gift in her Will to MS Plus. She joins an increasing number of Australians doing the same thing.



**‘Perhaps my legacy could lead to better treatments, and I’m optimistic about a cure. But MS Plus can only support research and operate if it has adequate resources, and I want my gift to play a part in that work,’ she said.**

To ensure she can leave her legacy, Elizabeth has been putting a small sum aside each month, knowing that even a modest amount can make a difference.

**‘You don’t have to be wealthy to do this,’ she said.**





### **Contact MS Plus**

Phone: **1800 042 138**

Website and online chat: **[www.msplus.org.au](http://www.msplus.org.au)**

Email: **[connect@msplus.org.au](mailto:connect@msplus.org.au)**

ABN **66 004 942 287**

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[instagram.com/wearemsplus](https://instagram.com/wearemsplus)