

Together to beat MS

Renewing our local
networks



Renewing our local networks

We're here for everyone living with MS – the 100,000 people with MS in the UK and the many more who are personally affected.

Our 34,000 members, 5,500 volunteers and 277 branches are united by one vision, one strategy and by our seven goals to beat MS.

Our network of local branches makes us strong. Through them, people affected by MS support each other, provide an important source of information, campaign for change and raise vital funds for our national and local work.

We will build on that strength. But we know that essential changes are needed to re-invigorate our local networks. As a result, we have a set of bold, practical and ambitious proposals to achieve what people affected by MS want and need.

This set of proposals responds to what our volunteers and members have told us they want. Our approach is based on the evidence of the most effective services and support for people living with MS, and our understanding of how we can best use our shared resources to achieve the greatest impact for people affected by MS.

We want to hear your views. You can find out how to get involved on page 12.

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A shared sense of purpose

We will draw on our shared expertise and knowledge of MS, and in particular the expertise and understanding that people with MS have about their own condition.

We will improve our impact for people affected by MS through the services and support we provide, and our ability to campaign and influence others.

We will create exciting new opportunities to grow our income and achieve our goals faster.

We will mobilise our community to affect positive change.



Our local networks have a four point purpose:

1) Bringing the MS community together locally.

2) Providing support to people affected by MS, including families and carers.



3) Campaigning to influence others.

4) Raising income to support our goals.

Local
Networks



A strong, flourishing community for people affected by MS

In three years' time...

As a result of the Local Networks Programme, in three years' time, local volunteers and branches will have:

- Increased help to provide a prioritised set of services and support that will use our shared resources to achieve the greatest impact for people affected by MS.
- New resources, skills and opportunities to raise income and achieve our goals.
- More support to campaign to bring about changes in policy, practice, levels of understanding and awareness of MS, nationally and locally.
- Simpler administration processes so our volunteers can focus on making a difference to the lives of people affected by MS.

You can find out more about our ideas for improving our services and support for people affected by MS on page 5 and for making volunteering more rewarding on page 8. ➔

Our proposals

These proposals are based on our research into what people affected by MS want and need, and best practice for support and services.

Importantly, we are responding to what our volunteers, members and people affected by MS have said through the Working Locally Review, volunteer forums, surveys and the development of our strategy.

Improved support for people affected by MS

We want people affected by MS to have more access to friendship and support, improved physical and emotional wellbeing, and to feel part of a strong, flourishing community. We want people with MS to have more control over their condition, through support that builds on their strengths, experience and knowledge.

Our priorities for our local services are:

- Support so that more people affected by MS are able to connect with each other.
- Providing information, including about national and local support.
- Emotional support to help with the anxiety and distress that is all too often associated with MS.
- Support for people with MS to be as physically active as they can.
- Support for people with MS to feel in control of their condition and their treatment.

We will centrally underpin our local work by:

- Bringing in new funders to support innovation and new services.
- Introducing a new supporter services centre to manage enquiries.
- Growing our online community and delivering services digitally to reach and support people affected by MS wherever they live.
- Measuring our impact to ensure we provide everyone affected by MS with the very best lifelong, life-changing support.

A need to prioritise

We are considering whether the following services will be a future focus for our local networks:

- Clinical services where we do not have the infrastructure or staffing to support them.
- Holiday homes which do not meet statutory or legislative requirements, provide value for money or where people's demand for the use of these homes is low.
- Day centres where they are not financially secure and able to meet quality standards.
- Unprofitable shops.

We would welcome your view on these issues. Where any final decision on the strategy for our local networks directly affects your branch, we would then work with you on a case-by-case basis as to what this would mean for you in practice.

Supporting volunteers, connecting people affected by MS



A better experience for volunteers

You've told us we can make volunteering more rewarding by helping you make a bigger difference to people affected by MS, simplifying our administration processes, providing more opportunities to campaign for change and making it easier to raise funds.

To reduce the administrative burden on some of the committed volunteers who run our branches, we propose to offer two ways to be an MS group.

MS Connect (working title): A branch focused on providing information and running social activities. We will make these groups as easy to run as possible, with an emphasis on:

- social activities
- fundraising, information and campaigning
- simplified administration.

MS Wellbeing (working title): A branch providing a full set of services covering:

- social activities
- information
- emotional support
- support to be physically active
- programmes that support people with MS to feel more in control of their condition and treatment.

Over the next year we will work with all our branches to help them identify the right type of group for them.

A simpler way

Just like offering a choice of MS group, the rest of our proposals aim to make volunteering simpler and more rewarding.

We propose to:

- Provide a menu of free fundraising materials.
- Create easier ways for groups to manage their membership data.
- Create a new web-to-print service, providing editable templates for materials such as newsletters, and making the printing process straightforward.
- Adapt and extend the training we offer so it's accessible and helps volunteers develop the skills and knowledge they need.
- Support branches in attracting new funding to grow our services.
- Provide greater access to MS Society email via tablet and smartphone.
- Recruit new volunteers by offering attractive new roles and promoting opportunities centrally.
- Clearly define staff and volunteer roles.

We are asking for members' views on the requirement for branches to have an annual meeting and the proposal that lead volunteers could be selected by local volunteers and staff instead of by an election.

A clearer structure for MS Support

We understand that our MS Support volunteers want tailored support, appropriate training and a clearer structure around the work of staff and the role of volunteers.

We propose redeveloping the MS Support programme, creating two new 1-2-1 volunteer support roles:

- A core role focusing on providing local information and a listening ear.
- A new, staff-managed, local buddying scheme, focusing on providing support for people with MS when their lives are changing.

We will encourage our volunteers to say which role they think will be right for them, according to which best fits their skills and interests.

We propose to further integrate national and local grant giving and to jointly develop our grants policy with volunteers. We suggest that, in the longer term, volunteers would work across groups assessing local grants, to ensure our process is rigorous, transparent and consistent.

We want your thoughts on these proposals. You can find out how to give feedback on page 12. ➡

We'd love to hear from you



How to give us your feedback

We believe these proposals will strengthen our local networks, improve the experience of our volunteers and, most importantly, increase our impact for people affected by MS.

We are asking our volunteers to answer three important questions about the Local Networks Programme:

- Do you support the direction of these proposals?
- Do you have comments on our ideas?
- Do you have alternative ideas you think we should consider?

We want to hear your views. You can contact us via email or letter, over the phone, or face to face. We'll be visiting committees between **November 2015** and **February 2016** and we'll be holding more than 30 volunteer engagement forums across the UK.

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- ➔ Find out more by going to volunteers.mssociety.org.uk
 - ✉ You can email us at: localnetworkprogramme@mssociety.org.uk
 - ✍ You can write to us at: Local Networks Programme, MS National Centre, 372 Edgware Road, London NW2 6ND
 - ☎ You can call us on: 0300 500 8084
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We're the MS Society

We're here for everyone living with multiple sclerosis – to provide practical help today, and the hope of a cure tomorrow. We play a leading role in research. We fight for better treatment and care. We let people with MS know they're not alone, and offer advice and support to help them manage the symptoms.