

MS Society Grants – changes in 2020

Health & Wellbeing Grants

Before the national grants were paused in April 2020, the budget for 2020 was already lower because of reduced income. This led to some difficult decisions about how to use limited funds to create maximum impact for those most in need, and changes to Health & Wellbeing Grants.

The key changes from January 2020 were:

- Savings limit reduced from £16,000 to £6,000.
- Maximum grant amount for each type of item reduced.
- The list of items we could consider was reduced by removing items that our Grants Panel felt had lower impact or more potential to have other funding options.

We stopped considering grants for: standard holidays, Motability advance payments, car adaptations, driveways, gardens, driving lessons, home repairs or complementary therapies.

We aimed to keep national and local grant giving aligned, but did not want to impose changes on those groups who award grants, without consultation. Therefore, groups could either keep awarding grants under the previous categories and maximums, or choose to adopt the new rules, depending on their own budgets.

We know that COVID-19 has meant reduced income for groups, so we suggest that you follow the new rules. However, groups with higher funds can still choose to follow the previous rules while development work is happening this year.

Carers Grants

The national grants programme also awarded grants to carers under a separate scheme developed in consultation with carers. Groups are welcome to award Carers Grants under this scheme, if you choose to.

Good practice guidelines – awarding Health & Wellbeing Grants

To assess grant applications for your group you will need to:

- have a grants panel of three volunteers to consider anonymised applications
- declare all conflicts of interest, and make sure those making decisions haven't been involved with helping the applicant with their application
- provide and regularly check an MS Society email address for applicants to send forms to (ideally your MS Society groupnamesupport@ or groupname@ email)
- agree an annual budget for grants in your coordinating team

Make sure that the applicant meets the eligibility criteria:

- They have MS and live in the UK
- They haven't had a Health & Wellbeing Grant in the last year
- They have under £6,000 in savings (under £16,000 for 2019 rules)
- They have not already paid for or ordered the item

Make sure that the applicant has:

- fully completed and signed a [Health & Wellbeing Grant application form](#)
- given consent for their data to be processed - they must have ticked the box in the data protection statement on the application form
- provided a letter of support from a health or social care professional – to confirm the item is needed and is suitable for the applicant
- provided confirmation of their diagnosis of MS (can be in the letter of support)
- provided two quotes for the item they need
- applied for any statutory funding applicable

Statutory Funding

To make best use of our funds, and to meet Charity Commission rules, charities cannot replace statutory funding. This is funding that should come from the local authority or NHS. Funding is often means tested, and there may only be part funding.

The main items that could be covered by statutory funding are home adaptations, wheelchairs and respite care. If someone applies for one of these items, make sure they have applied for any funding and ask to see a letter or other document. This should show whether they have been awarded funding, and if so how much – or an explanation of why it hasn't been awarded.

Key funding:

- Home adaptations: Disabled Facilities Grants (England, Wales, Northern Ireland) OR Scheme of Assistance adaptation grants (Scotland). Applicants should request an occupational therapy assessment through social services
- Wheelchairs: funding from the NHS / HSC Wheelchair Service (referral usually needed by GP or other NHS professional)
- Respite care: funding from social services (usually very limited)

Item	<p>Who should write a letter of support and what they must include</p> <p>Confirmation of MS diagnosis can be in the letter, or provided separately (eg copy of an appointment letter with MS professional)</p>
Home adaptations	<p>Occupational therapist (adult social care)</p> <p>Confirm assessment and outline adaptations recommended</p> <p>Details of statutory funding: Disabled Facilities Grant / Scheme of Assistance grant amount, and applicant's assessed contribution</p>
Wheelchairs	<p>Occupational therapist or Wheelchair Service</p> <p>Confirm assessment and details of wheelchair recommended</p> <p>Details of whether or not the applicant is eligible for funding from the Wheelchair Service (this may be a voucher for part of the cost)</p>
Mobility scooters	<p>Occupational therapist or other suitably qualified professional</p> <p>Confirm the need for a scooter and that the type requested is suitable</p>
Riser-recliner chairs and profiling beds	<p>Occupational therapist or other suitably qualified professional such as a district nurse</p> <p>Confirm which chair or bed is needed (including need for specialised features if relevant) and whether any money is available from the NHS or social services</p>
Bankruptcy or debt relief order fees	<p>Free, independent debt advice service (eg CAB, StepChange) - letter or report from a debt advisor or an online service</p> <p>Confirm that they've given the applicant debt advice, recommend bankruptcy or a debt relief order, and what this will cost</p>
Exercise equipment	<p>Physiotherapist</p> <p>Confirm what equipment is needed, and whether any health funding is available</p>
Specialist equipment	<p>Relevant specialist (such as occupational therapist, speech therapist, physio etc)</p> <p>Confirm what equipment is needed, and whether any funding is available</p>
Respite breaks	<p>A health or social care professional (such as an MS nurse, GP, social worker or occupational therapist)</p> <p>Explain the need for the respite break, how it will help the applicant, and details of any care and support needs that we should take into account. Confirm if there's any funding from statutory services</p>
Other items	<p>A health or social care professional (such as an MS nurse, GP, social worker or occupational therapist)</p> <p>Confirm need for the item and how it will help the applicant</p>

Assessing Health & Wellbeing Grant applications

When you assess applications, think about:

- will the item make a significant and lasting impact on the applicant's health and wellbeing (improve their mental or physical wellbeing, increase independence, strengthen social inclusion)
- is the applicant likely to be able to afford the item if you don't award a grant (look at the amount of their savings compared to the cost of the item, and the amount of money they have to live on after housing costs)
 - there is a **financial assessment tool** you can use to help make sure you prioritise people in the most financial need
- is the item requested a good value option to meet the applicant's needs

And make sure you:

- treat members and non-members equally. Applicants don't have to be a member of the MS Society or of your group to get a grant – we're here for everyone affected by MS
- treat all applications confidentially, do not discuss details outside of the panel
- respect that everyone's experience of MS is unique to them – don't make assumptions about an applicant's symptoms
- don't recommend what the applicant should apply for or tell them a make or model you think would be more suitable
- don't base your grant giving decision on personal bias or judgement including an applicant's sexual orientation, race, marital status, or beliefs
- keep grants within the maximum grant amounts – whether you follow the new or old rules, you must apply the same maximums to all applications
- consider your annual budget for grants, thinking about how many applications you may receive over the year so you can aim to treat every applicant equally. Depending on your budget, your coordinating team may need to set lower grant maximums for each category to help spread out your funds

We do not consider Health & Wellbeing Grants for:

- × items that have already been ordered or purchased
- × ongoing costs, such as daily living costs, travel and servicing costs for equipment
- × debt repayments, legal fees, university fees, private cars, boilers, funeral costs
- × medical treatment, travel costs for treatment in another country
- × **since January 2020:** Motability advance payments, car adaptations, driving lessons, home repairs, driveways, drop kerbs, garden adaptations, holidays, complementary therapies (your group can award grants for these items if you are choosing to follow 2019 rules)

Health and Wellbeing Grant maximum amounts	2020	2019
Home adaptations	£2500	£3500
Wheelchairs	£2000	£3000
Scooters	£1000	£1500
Profiling beds – standard	£1000	£1500
Profiling beds – specialised features essential (eg turning beds)	£1500	£2500
Riser recliner chairs – standard	£1000	£1500
Riser recliner chairs – specialised features essential (such as lateral supports or pressure relief)	£1500	£2000
Exercise equipment	£1500	£2000
Communication aids (eye recognition systems etc)	£1000	£2000
Clinical aids/specialist equipment (FES, Lycra orthoses etc)		£1200
Motability advance payments or car adaptations	REMOVED	£1200
Driving lessons	REMOVED	£500
Flooring	£600	£1000
Furnishings (including standard beds) and domestic appliances	£600	£600
Essential home repairs (including post-adaptations work)	REMOVED	£600
Removal costs	REMOVED	£600
Computers/tablets/laptops	£350	£500
Bankruptcy or Debt Relief Order fees *These can only be paid by online banking	£680	£680
Educational classes/short courses (we will only pay for a fixed number of classes, we do not fund ongoing costs or long term educational costs)		£500
From Jan 2020 – Vocational training (accredited courses to develop or change career)	£800	
Activities such as complementary therapies, Pilates and yoga (where this is not an ongoing cost)		£300
From Jan 2020 - Activities and related items (for example gym membership, short courses / one off block of sessions)	£300	
Other items which support health and wellbeing (case by case)	£500	£500
Breaks at respite centres (or breaks where specialist care needs are met / paid care hours or equipment hire on breaks) – one week maximum (2019 £1800 limit for very high care needs, £1000 limit in most other cases)	£1200	£1800
Holidays (the total cost of the holiday must not exceed £1200, grant limit is total, not per person)	REMOVED	£600

Awarding Carers Grants – in addition to Health & Wellbeing Grants

Make sure that the applicant meets the eligibility criteria:

- They are a carer for someone with MS
We define a carer as someone who without payment (other than Carer's Allowance), provides help and support to a partner, child, relative, friend or neighbour with MS, who could not manage fully without their help.
- They live in the UK
- For adult carers - they have under £23,000 in savings

Make sure that the applicant has:

- fully completed and signed a [Carers Grant application form](#)
- given consent for their data to be processed - they must have ticked the box in the data protection statement on the application form
- provided a letter of support from a health or social care professional, which confirms that they are a carer for someone with MS
This could be from a teacher, carer's support worker, social worker, health professional or other similar professional, or a Support Volunteer
- provided two quotes for the item they need

What can carers apply for, and how often?

Carers can apply for grants to support either their leisure OR personal development

Leisure includes recreational activities (or associated costs e.g. equipment, transport) which would be beneficial to the carer, giving them a chance to relax, socialise, or try something new. This could include a school trip for a young carer, sports equipment, music lessons, gardening equipment, etc.

Personal development includes courses (or associated costs, e.g. course materials, transport) to enable a carer to get back into work, embark on a new career to fit in with their caring role, or develop other 'life skills' such as learning to drive.

Carers Grant categories and ages	How often can someone apply?	Maximum grant amount	
		Leisure	Personal development
Young carers 15 years and under	Once	up to £300	up to £300
Transitional carers 16 – 24 years	Once	up to £300	up to £1000
Adult carers 25 years and above	5 years from previous grant award	up to £300	up to £1000

Record keeping and data protection

- Keep a record of all grant applications your group considers, including the name, date, what was requested, whether it was approved or declined, the grant amount and date it was paid. This will help with reporting group finances, planning your budget, fundraising and promoting your good work
- You can use the Group Grantmaking Record template on the volunteering website. If you want to use this to report back to the full coordinating group, use an applicant reference instead of their name for confidentiality
- Your finance volunteer will also need to register grants that have been paid on the online accounting system, as E1 Support Grants. The volunteer website has [more information about online accounting](#)
- Inform the applicant in writing (email is fine) - whether the application was approved or declined
- If approved include the grant amount, how long it will be held open, any conditions (eg raising remaining balance) and how long before they can re-apply
- Tell the applicant to arrange for an invoice from the supplier to be sent to the group for payment. Tell them whether the group will pay by cheque or bank transfer
- Stay aware of data protection and GDPR:
 - keep paper documents in locked storage
 - password protect electronic documents
 - only share personal data with people who need and are permitted to know
 - only use MS Society email addresses within the group when dealing with grant applications
- You must hold grants information for seven years if you've awarded and paid out a grant. Unsuccessful applications must be destroyed one year after the decision was made - this allows for audit and any queries
- Full guidance about data protection is available in the [Group Handbook section A6 Handling Data](#)

Support for your group

Please get in touch with the **Volunteer Support Team**:

volunteersupport@mssociety.org.uk or call 0300 500 8084 - option 3

Working hours: 9-5 Monday to Friday (closed on bank holidays)