

MS Society Grants

Our support for people affected by MS includes offering grants to people who have financial need.

Our grants make a difference to the lives of people with MS by helping to pay for things that maintain or improve their health and wellbeing.

They also recognise the valuable role played by family and friends who are carers. Grants support carers to take up an activity outside of their caring role, or with personal development.

Guiding factors and best practice in grant making

The services that we deliver as a charity are guided by a number of factors that shape what we can and can't do, including how we process grant applications.

We need to meet rules and requirements of the Charity Commission, HMRC, and our insurers. We also need to meet our data protection duties and take reasonable steps to protect us against fraud.

As an organisation, we also want to follow best practice so that we deliver the best services we can for people affected by MS. We aim to meet these grant making best practice principles:

- Transparency, integrity, accountability
- Fair objective assessments, consistency
- Accessibility
- Confidentiality
- Value for money, targeted to most need
- Having positive impact

This guide sets out what your group needs to do to follow best practice in grant making. It also has details about the grants we offer and the information you need to consider a grant application.

Getting ready to consider grants

To consider grant applications in 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

And make sure you:

- treat members and non-members equally. Applicants don't have to be a member 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
- 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

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)

Assessing Health & Wellbeing Grant applications

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 not already paid for or ordered the item
- They have under £6,000 in savings

As an exception, we can consider requests from applicants with over £6,000 if they need a high-cost item, such as a significant home adaptation or a specialised wheelchair. A relevant health or social care professional must confirm that the item is necessary to meet the applicant's needs, and the best value option available to them.

The applicant will need to contribute an amount towards the cost of the item that will take their savings below £6,000.

For example, a home adaptation costs £12,000 (after any statutory funding)

The applicant has £9,000 in savings.

If they contribute more than £3,000 we can consider a grant application towards the balance.

Make sure that the applicant has:

- fully completed and signed a [Health and 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 suitable (more details on the chart on page 5)
- 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

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)?
 - there is an [impact assessment tool](#) you can use to help consider whether the item will have impact in the areas we prioritise
- 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?

What can a Health and Wellbeing Grant help with?

These are items we can consider, and how much the maximum grant is for each type of item. Applicants are told these amounts to help them look for quotes – for most items we expect the maximum amount to cover reasonable quality items.

Your group may need to set lower maximums, depending on your budget.

Health and Wellbeing Grant category	Maximum grant
Home adaptations	£2,500
Wheelchairs	£2,000
Scooters	£1,500
Standard profiling adjustable beds / standard riser recliner chairs	£1,000
Specialised profiling beds (for example height adjustable or turning beds) / specialised seating (for example lateral supports or pressure relief) – where specific features are essential to meet need	£1,500
Specialist equipment (for example FES, portable hoists, sleep systems, specialist exercise machines, eye recognition systems)	£1,000
Furniture (including standard beds) / domestic appliances / flooring / removal costs / essential home repairs	£600
Computers / tablets / laptops	£350
Bankruptcy or DRO fees (*these can only be paid by BACS transfer*)	£680
Vocational training (accredited courses to develop or change career)	£800
Physical activity (for example one-off or taster gym membership / one off block of sessions, exercise equipment)	£300
Breaks at respite centres (or breaks where specialist care needs are met) / paid care hours and equipment hire on breaks - one week maximum	£1,200
Other items that support health & wellbeing (on a case by case basis – must not be on the list of items we will not consider)	£500

We do not consider:

- × items that have already been ordered or purchased
- × items that statutory services must provide or pay for
- × ongoing costs, such as daily living costs, travel costs, care home fees, and servicing costs for equipment
- × debt repayments, legal fees, university fees, medical treatment, travel costs for treatment in another country, complementary therapies, funeral costs, holidays, boilers, private cars, car adaptations, Motability advance payments, driving lessons

Item	Who should write a letter of support and what they must include
Home adaptations	<p>Confirmation of MS diagnosis can be in the letter, or provided separately (eg copy of an appointment letter with MS professional)</p> <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>
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>
Physical activity	<p>Physiotherapist, or other health professional</p> <p>Confirm the activity or equipment is needed and suitable</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>
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 the need for the item and how it will help the applicant</p>

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)