



Attitudes towards MS prevention applicant guidance

September 2024

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We're the largest charitable funder of MS research in the UK. We welcome applications for projects that will increase understanding of the cause of MS. And find new effective treatments or prevention strategies. As well as projects improving care and services for people affected by MS too.

We don't make any decisions on the scientific quality and relevance of applications. These are made by independent peer and lay reviewers. As members of the Association of Medical Research Charities we adhere to the Principles of Peer Review.

- [Read more about our approach to reviewing applications on our website.](#)

You should use this guidance document with the "Help" sections in the application forms on our online application system Symplectic Grant Tracker. There's a list of key terms used throughout this guidance and their definitions in the appendix.

- [Log into Grant Tracker.](#)

1. Summary of the call

1.1. Background and context

Our James Lind Alliance (JLA) Priority Setting Partnership in 2013 identified the 10 highest priority unanswered research questions for people affected by MS, their carers and health care professionals. The second question was 'can MS be prevented?'

- [Read about our JLA research priorities on our website.](#)

Risk reduction and prevention is one of the themes in our current Research Strategy. Ultimately our goal here is to prevent MS for future generations. But research into MS prevention has been largely underfunded for decades. A recent landscape analysis found only 8% of current global investment to MS research focuses on risk reduction or prevention.

- [Download our 2023-2024 Research Strategy Extension from our website.](#)

In December 2023, we established a UK MS Prevention Taskforce to boost MS prevention research. This brings together a small group of researchers from MS and related disease areas and people affected by MS to discuss the role of research in accelerating progress towards the prevention of MS. Their purpose is to develop an action plan enabling progress towards MS risk reduction. And ultimately primary prevention.

1.2. Purpose and scope

The Taskforce has identified a need for research exploring attitudes towards MS risk and prevention. We need to better understand what people's views are on these topics so we can develop appropriate information resources. And understand how to communicate about risk and prevention in the most effective, ethical and sensitive way. Including in the context of prevention research.

We're inviting applications for a short-term qualitative research project exploring perceptions of and attitudes towards MS risk and prevention in two populations:

1. People living with MS
2. First degree relatives of people with MS, who don't have a diagnosis of MS themselves (i.e. those who may be at greater risk of developing MS).

We intend to fund **one** project through this commissioned call. And we expect that the successful project will:

- Provide insight into the perceptions and attitudes towards MS risk and prevention in those already living with MS, and those who may be at increased risk of MS compared to the general population (first degree relatives). And the similarities and differences between these two groups.
- Use these insights to develop recommendations to support communication around MS risk. And strategies and approaches that may be most effective to support involvement and participation in MS prevention research.

The key deliverables will be a summary report and presentation of the research findings and recommendations to the MS Society. Your report must include a lay summary. And you must submit your report to us by the project end date, so you should factor this into your timelines.

Our expectation is that the successful applicant will keep us informed of their dissemination plans beyond the project end date. And will work with us to disseminate the findings to a wider audience.

1.3. Timescale and budget

The project must start by April 2025, and can be up to a maximum of 9 months in duration.

We'll fund projects up to the value of £60,000. You can find more information on what we'll pay for in the ['Finance and costs' section of this guidance document \(section 3.6\)](#).

2. Our award conditions and policies

You should also read our Award Conditions and Policies. This document contains our:

- **Open Access Policy:** We're committed to open and unrestricted access to the results of our funded research. We require any research papers based on our funded research to be published in an open access environment.
- **Research Award Conditions:** The Award Conditions, together with the Award Letter and the Policies, set out the terms and conditions on which we make Awards.
- **Intellectual Property Policy:** This Intellectual Property (IP) Policy document sets out principles that we're guided by when considering questions relating to intellectual property and research matters.
- [Download our Award Conditions and Policies from our website.](#)
- [Read more about how to manage an MS Society Research Award.](#)

2.1. Our position on researcher leave

We strongly believe that researchers should be supported to take periods of leave when they need to. And part-time opportunities should be available for early career researchers to give more people the chance to progress their careers. As part of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) action plan for MS Society research we're sharing our position on leave for our funded researchers.

We're supportive of our funded researchers taking leave. For example, family leave (maternity, paternity, adoption and shared parental leave) and sick leave. This includes PhD students working on research we fund.

This is our position on researcher leave. It outlines our viewpoint and our expectations, but it's not a policy. Researchers working on our funded projects aren't our employees. So you should check and follow the relevant leave policies at your institution.

- [Read more about our position on researcher leave on our website.](#)
- [Read more about our work to improve EDI in MS research.](#)

2.2. Our position on generative AI in research

Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT could bring benefits to MS research. But there are risks associated with their use, particularly in research funding and application review. We support the Research Funders Policy Group's joint statement on the use of generative AI in funding applications and assessment.

You should note:

- If using generative AI tools in developing your application, you must use them responsibly. And in line with relevant legal and ethical standards where these exist or as they develop.
- You must acknowledge any outputs from generative AI tools in funding applications.

We're committed to maintaining confidentiality in our research funding processes. As this is essential for safeguarding the sharing of scientific opinions and assessments. It's not clear whether anything put into generative AI tools remains confidential. So, our applicants, reviewers and panel members must not put any part of any application under review into these tools. This includes for the purposes of review assessment, applicant responses or other purposes.

- [Read the Research Funders Policy Group's joint statement on the use of generative AI in funding applications and assessment.](#)

3. Submitting your application

Your application should be carefully considered and show a high level of grantsmanship. You should thoroughly review it before submission and ask any co-applicants to do the same.

Your application must be submitted through Symplectic Grant Tracker. You must complete all sections of the application form. If sections aren't completed properly, we'll return your application. Or it might not be validated for review.

- [Log into Grant Tracker.](#)
- [Download guidance on how to use Grant Tracker from our website.](#)

3.1. Who's eligible to apply?

This is an open call, so any eligible UK-based researcher can apply.

You must be based at a UK university or NHS institution and be the Principal Investigator (PI) of the project. Your application must include an applicant with a tenured position for the duration of the Award. This doesn't have to be the lead applicant.

Established researchers or more junior/early career researchers can apply. If you're an early career researcher, you must demonstrate that you have the skills and experience necessary to lead this project. The expertise and suitability of the Lead Applicant (PI) and other members of the project team will be assessed as part of the review process.

The project team must include somebody with experience of undertaking MS research. And/or an MS clinician. This is in addition to involvement of people affected by MS. Inclusion of people affected by MS as co-applicants or advisers is strongly encouraged, but not a requirement. At a minimum your proposal must have clear and robust patient and public involvement plans. [There's more information on PPI in your research in section 3.3.](#)

3.2. Including your research contributions in your application

We're exploring different ways of recognising and rewarding the full range of contributions that researchers make in their fields. We recognise that traditional CV formats aren't suitable for all our applicants. And there are research contributions that aren't acknowledged using these formats. One way we're doing this is by adopting narrative CV-style elements in our application forms.

- [Read more about narrative CVs on the UKRI website.](#)

Instead of including a list of your publications, we're asking lead applicants to highlight **up to five** research contributions or outputs. These should be the ones that are most relevant for your current application.

For each output, you **must** explain its importance and relevance to your proposed research. And your specific contribution to the described work. You don't need to include five examples. You could highlight two or three that you feel are most significant. You shouldn't include reference to any metrics, such as total number of publications, journal impact factor or h-index in this section.

Outputs can include data sets, software, research materials, conference presentations or publications, commercial or interventional products or tools, clinical practice developments, educational products and innovation, research and policy publications.

Other CV information, like your employment history, qualifications and research grants you've held, will still be included. You should make sure these are up-to-date using 'Manage my details' on the Grant Tracker Portal.

For co-applicants and advisers, all CV information including publication lists will be included. It's your responsibility to make sure your co-applicants and advisers have updated their CVs and publications before submission. Or this could affect the review of your application.

3.3. Patient and public involvement (PPI) in your research

Patient and public involvement (PPI) in research is when people with personal experience of health conditions work in active partnership with researchers. Or research funders like us.

Involvement isn't the same as recruiting participants to your study. Or sharing information with people through public engagement events. Involvement is working **in partnership** with people affected by MS to shape, design and oversee a project.

- [Read the NIHR's guide to public involvement in funding applications](#)
- [Read the NIHR's 'Briefing notes for researchers - public involvement in NHS, health and social care research'](#)
- [Find more resources on NIHR's Learning for Involvement website](#)

In your application you need to describe:

- How people affected by MS have been involved in the development of your proposal (pre-application involvement)
- How you plan to involve people affected by MS in your ongoing study, if funded.

Pre-application involvement

Before applying, you should involve people affected by MS in the development of your proposal. This ensures:

- Your research questions are relevant to their experiences
- Your lay summary is accessible and understandable to our lay reviewers
- Your study design considers the needs of people affected by MS

Involvement in your ongoing study

As well as working with people to develop your application, you should also plan how you'll continue to involve people affected by MS throughout the project. For example, people affected by MS could:

- Join an advisory group to provide their perspective throughout your project. And advise on challenges as they arise
- Review participant information materials such as leaflets, posters, webpages, questionnaires (for clinical projects)
- Advise on the best ways to communicate and disseminate your findings
- Advise on the best approach for recruiting participants
- Work as a peer researcher in your team to be involved throughout the duration of the project (if appropriate)

Budgeting for involvement

Involving people in research requires time and money. It's important to account for the costs of involvement when setting your budget. As without an adequate budget you'll struggle to involve people effectively.

You should include the costs for any planned PPI activities in your application. For example, you should consider:

- Expenses

You must cover any expenses that people will incur by getting involved in PPI activities. People should never be out-of-pocket. This may include, for example, travel, subsistence (including the cost of carers or personal assistance to also attend face-to-face meetings), broadband and childcare costs for online meetings.

- Training and support

Training and induction sessions may be required so that people affected by MS are supported to carry out their role well. There are many free resources available online, but you should consider whether any paid training is required. You may also wish for your PPI contributors to join you at conferences and events.

- Payment

It's best practice to offer payment for members of the public who get involved in your work, in recognition of their time, skills and expertise. How much to budget depends on several factors. For example, how often they are going to be involved and what level of responsibility they will have.

- [Read the INVOLVE guidelines for payment and recognition for public involvement on the NIHR website.](#)

You should read and work through the NIHR's payment guidance for researchers. This includes information on budgeting and example payment rates for different activities.

We can support you to plan and budget for your public involvement, connect you with people affected by MS and to carry out activities. [Get in touch with us by emailing researchnetwork@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:researchnetwork@mssociety.org.uk)

3.4. Writing your lay summary

You need to write a clear lay summary for your proposal. People affected by MS will review your application alongside experts in your field. Our funding review panels may also include researchers without direct expertise in your area of research.

If your lay summary is too brief or too complex, it'll be difficult for them to comment on and score your application. And this will affect whether it might be funded.

We encourage you to use Plain English when writing your lay summary. This will make your writing as accessible as possible to all panel members. You can [read about how we use plain English to be more accessible on our website.](#)

- [Read more about Plain English and see some examples on the Plain English Campaign's website.](#)
- [Read our 'Tips for writing a good lay summary'.](#)

3.5. Equality, diversity and inclusion in your research

We're committed to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in research. We want research findings to be as relevant as possible for everyone with MS in the UK. And to ensure that everyone affected by MS has the opportunity to take part in or engage with MS research. Increasing the diversity of our funded research is one area of focus of our EDI in research action plan.

- [Find out more about our EDI in research action plan and progress on our website.](#)

We expect you to consider EDI at all stages of your project. You'll be asked to describe how you've considered EDI in the following areas in your application:

- Public engagement and outreach activities
- Participant recruitment

We've published blogs highlighting the importance of doing more inclusive research. And showcasing examples of how our funded researchers are putting this at the heart of their projects:

- [Read our blog: 'Meet the researchers who want seldom-heard groups to be at the centre of their research into fatigue'](#)
- [Read our blog: 'Who is MS research missing?'](#)
- [Read our blog: 'Improving MS care for people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds'](#)

3.6. Finances and costs

You should work with finance offices, local NHS trusts and the local NIHR CRN network to ensure that all costs of research have been identified and appropriately paid for. The sections below outline our list of acceptable and unacceptable costs. You should read it carefully, including the notes column. [You can request the costs guidance table in an alternative format by emailing \[research@mssociety.org.uk\]\(mailto:research@mssociety.org.uk\).](#)

Please note:

- All requested budget items must be fully justified in your application.
- We may reduce or remove ineligible costs.
- If you believe that any of the 'unacceptable costs' should be seen as direct costs for your project, you must provide full and detailed justification for this in your application.
- We won't be responsible for any increase in the costs of research (whether caused by increased consumables costs, increased personnel costs or otherwise). We won't increase the award to reflect increased research costs, including increased salaries due to nationally agreed pay awards or inflation, once the award has been made.

3.6.1. Staff members

Acceptable costs	Unacceptable costs	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salaries for staff who work specifically on the funded project, employed at the host institution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apprenticeship levy isn't covered. • Salary for the applicant team isn't permitted. This includes co-applicants and advisers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are some circumstances where we'd consider a proportion of salary for one member of the applicant team. Their salary for research must be reliant on grant funding.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff may include research, technical or other roles, such as a project manager. • Staff time at other institutions for specific project work packages, such as specialist analysis. This should be included as a non-salary “Consultant” cost in Consumables. 		<p>And the request must be strongly justified for the benefit of MS research. Their institution must confirm their salary circumstances before we make an award.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You should provide a copy of current salary scales in the ‘Supplementary attachments’ section for all salaried staff. • You must quote an appropriate grading and salary, approved by the administrative office of the host institution. We need this even where staff members can’t be named. • The employing institution is responsible for providing maternity benefit and increases in salary costs other than annual increments and cost of living awards.
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3.6.2. Consumables

Acceptable costs	Unacceptable costs	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection materials, if specific to the project. • Transcription costs • Patient and public involvement (PPI) costs, including travel for PPI representatives. • Consultant costs, such as people providing specialist analysis. • Travel for non-conference/meeting research activities for named staff members on the award if essential to the project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article publishing or open access charges. • Standard per unit IT charges. • First class travel or accommodation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A full justification is required for all consumables. • You can read more guidance on PPI costs on the NIHR INVOLVE website.

3.6.3. Equipment

Acceptable costs	Unacceptable costs	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equipment that’s specific to this grant and essential to carry out the proposed research. • Costs may include purchase, delivery and installation of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equipment can’t be requested for routine or service use. • Annual software licencing fees aren’t eligible for inclusion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computing equipment costs are capped at £1,500. • Each piece of equipment, including computing equipment, must be fully justified.

<p>scientific equipment where that equipment is specific to the grant.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding for computer equipment or software is only allowed if absolutely essential for the project. And must be fully justified in your application. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phone/computer accessories (drivers, cases, chargers, batteries). We won't pay personal computing costs (for example, laptop purchase) as part of this award. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The host institution is responsible for equipment. This includes its accommodation, operating and servicing costs, and any insurance that may be necessary. Equipment access costs: You can't include Directly Allocated costs. You can include fees relating to the use of core equipment, services or research facilities that are essential to the project. You must state the cost per sample/time period for these.
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3.6.4. Other

Unacceptable costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excess treatment costs Institutional overheads Financial services Personnel services Recruitment costs Public relations General institution libraries Departmental services (administration, secretarial, printing, photocopying) Telephone charges and postage or courier services Journal subscriptions Furniture Conference costs: due to the short duration of this award, you can't include conference costs. Our expectation is that the successful applicant will keep us informed of their dissemination plans beyond the project end date. And will work with us to disseminate the findings to a wider audience.

Types of costs

Your institution's finance team should be able to provide further guidance on costings. If you are unsure please get in touch with us. Including ineligible costs may delay application submission or approval of award.

We won't fund the full economic costs of research (fECs), or a fixed proportion of these. We'll only pay for the Directly Incurred costs related specifically to the planned research to be undertaken in this grant. As a member of the AMRC we support their position statement on supporting research in universities outlining what charities pay for and why.

- [Read the position statement on charities supporting research in universities on the AMRC website.](#)

Directly incurred	Directly allocated	Indirect
<p>These include the familiar direct costs of research such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff (e.g. research assistant salaries) • Travel and subsistence • Consumables and Equipment (or specific access to equipment) <p>We'll pay these costs, but you'll need to justify why they're needed for the research.</p>	<p>These are shared costs, based on estimates and don't represent actual costs on a project-by-project basis. As such we will not pay these costs. They were previously included as 'indirect costs' heading. They include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The costing of the time spent by the applicant and co-applicants • Estates: the way these are calculated may vary between institutions. Different categories of space will be costed differently, for example laboratory space will be different to office-based costs. • Other Directly Allocated: these include the costs of shared resources, such as staff and equipment. 	<p>These costs are necessary for underpinning research but can't be allocated to individual projects. These include things like computing and information support, central services, general maintenance and other infrastructure costs. They'll be calculated separately by each Higher Education Institution (HEI), according to TRAC methodology. We won't cover Indirect Costs or any other non-attributable overhead costs in your budget. However, such costs may be eligible under the Charity Research Support Fund.</p>

3.7. Co-funding applications

We're open to co-funding applications with other funders. You should provide full details of the co-funder and amount they would be contributing.

3.8. References

You should cite all essential references relevant to your proposal. We don't specify a referencing style. But you must include enough information in the reference list for reviewers to find the publication. DOIs alone aren't sufficient.

Copies of in-press or submitted publications relevant to the proposal should also be included. You can add these in the "Supplementary attachments" section.

4. Criteria for review

Your application will be assessed on the quality of science. And the suitability and relevance to this call. The feasibility of completing the project within the timeframe and budget will also be a key consideration. Applications will be reviewed and scored by researchers with relevant expertise. And by people affected by MS (lay review).

We recommend writing in Plain English throughout your application as this improves accessibility. And means that all panel members can fully engage with and understand your proposal.

You can also suggest up to three potential peer reviewers for your application in the “Project Details” section of the online application form. And tell us any reviewers you don’t want to review your application, with justification.

- Once you’ve submitted your application, we validate it to make sure it fits the remit of this commissioned call. And to check that all sections of the form have been completed adequately.
- If your application is eligible, we’ll send it for independent review by researchers with relevant expertise. And by people affected by MS (lay review).
- Depending on the number of applications received, applications may go through a score-based shortlisting process:
 - This involves the Review Panel Chair for this call discussing the review scores and comments. A Vice Chair and a lay panel member may also be included, depending on the applications being considered.
 - They’ll recommend a shortlist of the highest quality and most relevant applications for further review. These will be applications that have the best chances of being considered fundable.
 - The remaining applications will be rejected (triaged).
 - If applicable, we’ll tell all applicants the shortlisting outcomes a few weeks before funding outcomes are announced.
- Shortlisted applications will be considered at a Review Panel meeting. The Review Panel will be made up of some of the people affected by MS and independent researchers who completed first stage reviews. Plus some additional experts selected based on the suitability of their expertise for this commissioned call. The Review Panel will provide a recommendation to us about which application should be funded.
- Our Board of Trustees then considers their recommendation for funding.
- Following approval by the Board, we’ll communicate official funding offer, make the award and the successful project will start.

The scoring guidance used by our reviewers is found on the next page. [You can request the scoring guidance for reviewers table in an alternative format by emailing research@mssociety.org.uk.](mailto:research@mssociety.org.uk)

Scoring guidance for reviewers

All reviewers are asked to score applications between 1 and 5, corresponding to ratings of highly fundable, potentially fundable and not fundable. We've outlined the criteria used to score applications and their ratings below.

Rating	Criteria
<p>Highly fundable</p> <p>(scores above 3.5)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research question(s) are highly appropriate for this call. And will significantly advance our understanding of attitudes towards MS risk and prevention among people with MS and first degree relatives of people with MS. • Research design is excellent and highly appropriate for this call • The project is highly feasible to be delivered within the timescale and budget • Research team is very strong, containing all relevant expertise/disciplines to deliver project outcomes. • Very good value for money • Proposal is clear and well written • People affected by MS are actively involved and influencing project at all relevant stages (PPI)
<p>Potentially fundable</p> <p>(scores between 2.5 and 3.5)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research question(s) are somewhat appropriate for this call. And will likely advance our understanding of attitudes towards MS risk and prevention among people with MS and first degree relatives of people with MS. • Research design is acceptable and appropriate for this call • The project is feasible to be delivered within the timescale and budget • Research team has relevant experience and contains most of the relevant expertise/disciplines to deliver project outcomes • Acceptable value for money • Elements of the application are unclear • Some elements of involving people affected by MS, where appropriate, but not well integrated or well supported • Project would only be fundable with some changes
<p>Not fundable</p> <p>(scores below 2.5)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research question(s) are irrelevant to this call. And won't advance our understanding of attitudes towards MS risk and prevention among people with MS and first degree relatives of people with MS • Research design is unsuitable for this call • The project isn't feasible to be delivered within the timescale and budget • Key expertise/skills missing from the research team • Poor value for money • Unclear application • Involvement of people affected by MS inappropriate or limited/ lacking

5. Contact us

Please let us know if you have any questions or need help. You can [email us at research@mssociety.org.uk](mailto:research@mssociety.org.uk) or call us on 020 8438 0822.

Thank you for your interest in our research funding.

6. Appendix: key terms and definitions

Term	Definition
Lead applicant	<p>The named lead applicant is the project leader. As lead applicant, you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the contact person for all correspondence relating to the application. • Have overall responsibility for the award and must actively engage in its direction.
Adviser	<p>Advisers don't need to be actively involved in the delivery of the project. But you must define their contribution (expertise, advice etc.) to the project team.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They can view and edit the application, and provide comments. • Advisers' CVs are included in the application PDF and seen by reviewers. • They need to confirm their participation. But don't need to approve the application. • You can't request salary costs for advisers.
Co-applicant	<p>A co-applicant is a researcher who'll be actively involved in the delivery of the project should the funding application be successful. You can't include them simply for supervisory purposes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-applicants can view and edit applications. • Co-applicants have to approve applications before they can be submitted.
Finance officer	<p>This is a member of your institution who's responsible for confirming and approving financial details of applications.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They act as final signatory for application submission. Your application won't be accepted if it's not approved by the Finance Officer before the funding deadline. • They'll be responsible for administering the grant if it is awarded.
Public engagement	<p>Where information and knowledge about research is provided and disseminated. Examples of engagement are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • science festivals open to the public • open days at a research centre • raising awareness in the media <p>Read more about public engagement on the National Centre for Co-ordinating Public Engagement's website.</p>
Public involvement (PPI)	<p>Public involvement (PPI)</p> <p>Where members of the public are actively involved in research projects and in research organisations. Examples of involvement include when people affected by MS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are involved in identifying research priorities • are members of a project steering group • comment on patient information materials <p>Read more about involvement on the NIHR website.</p>
Public participation	<p>Where people take part in a research study. Examples of participation include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • people being recruited to a clinical trial or other study • people completing a questionnaire as part of a study. <p>Read more about participation in trials on the NHS website.</p>
Research Network	<p>The Research Network are a passionate group of people living with MS or caring for someone with MS. They're not required to have specialist scientific knowledge, but are trained to use their personal experiences of MS to review applications, ensuring that the research we fund is of the highest importance to people affected by MS.</p>

We're the MS Society.
Our community is here for
you through the highs, lows
and everything in between.
We understand what life's
like with MS.

Together, we are strong
enough to stop MS.

mssociety.org.uk

Contact us

MS National Centre 020 8438 0700

info@mssociety.org.uk

MS Helpline Freephone 0808 800 8000

(weekdays 9am-9pm)

helpline@mssociety.org.uk

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Multiple Sclerosis Society

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