

A Fairer Future

Speak Up for People with MS

MS Society Manifesto for Scottish Parliament Election 2026

The MS community in Scotland is bigger than ever before: there are an estimated 17,400 people living with multiple sclerosis (MS).

Each week in Scotland, 15 people are diagnosed with MS. MS is a condition that affects the brain and spinal cord. This impacts how people move, think, and feel.

Symptoms are different for everybody and often invisible. MS is the most common neurological condition among young adults. Most people are diagnosed in their 20s or 30s, but it can affect people of all ages, races, and genders.

Improving Neurological Services

People in Scotland living with MS are facing extensive waits for diagnosis and specialist treatment due to a shortage of neurologists and MS nurses. September 2025 Public Health Scotland data shows that almost 8,000 people have been waiting over 6 months to see a neurologist, with just under 2,500 of them waiting for over a year.

The latest *My MS My Needs* report underscores these challenges, revealing that many people with MS struggle to access ongoing care essential for managing symptoms. The report found that a fifth of people with MS in Scotland could not see a neurologist when needed.

Nationally, large levels of unmet needs persist. Of people with MS:

40% require **specialist continence support**

38% need **physiotherapy support**

84% lack **cognitive support**

60% need **mood and emotional support**

64% need **assistance to remain physically active**

The UK neurology workforce remains overstretched and under-resourced, with **the UK ranking 44th out of 45 European countries for the ratio of neurologists to people with neurological conditions.**

Unmet specialist support needs for people with MS have profound implications for the economy, healthcare services, and society.

Research indicates that bladder and bowel issues, such as urinary tract infections, are the primary cause of emergency hospital admissions for people with MS, adding further strain on healthcare services.

All of this adds to the cost of treatment and causing misery for those affected.



Our Asks

- 1) Implement a Neurological Workforce Plan** to bring Scotland to at least the average number of neurologists per person with a neurological condition in Europe to reduce waiting times and enhance care quality.
- 2) Increase Access to Rehabilitation Services** to improve community support availability for people with MS to address unmet needs.
- 3) Support Research into New Innovations**
- 4) Commit to Comprehensive Treatment Access** and ensure every person with MS receives appropriate treatment by the end of the next parliament and introduce standards and monitoring at a national level.
- 5) Improve the care system and provide more support for Carers** by legislating and fully funding breaks for carers.

Investing in the care of people with MS benefits not only individuals and their families but also the broader economy. According to *Economist Impact's* report, *The Value of Action: Mitigating the Global Impact of Neurological Disorders*, **MS's annual economic burden in the UK in 2019 reached £2.78 billion (0.12% of GDP)**, with a per-patient average cost exceeding £35,000 per year in both direct and indirect expenses.

Fortunately, an increasing number of drugs are available to reduce the disease's impact. Appropriate use of these medications could decrease the economic toll by 17%, with rehabilitative physiotherapy potentially reducing it by an additional 3%.

The MS Society estimates that there are 17,400 people in Scotland with MS, resulting in **annual costs of £609.2 million to the public finances**.

By ensuring timely, recommended treatments for all eligible patients, as outlined in the *Economist Impact* report, **Scotland could reduce the disease's economic impact by an estimated 17%**, saving over **£93**

million for public finances while significantly improving quality of life for those with MS.

Investing in MS care isn't just the right thing to do; it's also financially the right choice for Scotland.

Securing Financial Independence

Many people in Scotland living with MS are struggling to make ends meet. Household income plays a crucial role in an individual's overall well-being, and for those with MS, limited income can be even more detrimental.

Households with at least one disabled member need an additional £975 per month, on average, to maintain a comparable standard of living to non-disabled households. When adjusted for inflation in 2022/2023, this figure rises to £1,122 per month.

The latest *My MS My Needs* report by the MS Society found that people with MS receiving benefits like Adult Disability Payment (ADP) were **nearly twice as likely to report financial hardship (66%) compared to those not on benefits (34%).**

These financial stresses significantly impact mental health, with **nearly three-quarters of those surveyed feeling stressed and anxious (72%) and over a third feeling lonely (44%).**

Additionally, people experiencing financial difficulties are more likely to have unmet care needs and are less likely to access specialist healthcare services. The upcoming Scottish Parliamentary election offers an opportunity to address



these issues and ensure that people living with MS receive the support they need to lead fulfilling lives.

Late in 2024, the Independent Review into Adult Disability Payment published its Interim Report. It had a number of findings, set the scene for the next stage of the review and outlined a number of recommendations that could be implemented immediately.

The Final Report was published in July 2025. For people with fluctuating conditions like MS, the review is a crucial opportunity to make sure the system is fair, accessible, and accounts for how symptoms can change over time.

Our Asks

1) Reform the criteria for Adult Disability Payment

- ▶ Remove the **20 Metre Rule** because it is an arbitrary and outdated measure and fails to account for the variable and complex nature of conditions like MS, excluding many who need mobility support to live independently and fully participate in society.
- ▶ Change the **‘Planning and Following a Journey’ Descriptors** so that they properly consider the fluctuating nature of MS symptoms, which can vary not only day to day but even within a single day, making reliable journey planning difficult.
- ▶ Remove the **50% Rule** because it is excessively restrictive and burdensome. For those with MS, whose symptoms are often unpredictable, this rule excludes many people who genuinely need support during periods of limited functionality.

2) Implement in full the other recommendations of the Final Report into Adult Disability Payment

By reforming the Adult Disability Payment system in these ways, Scotland can set an example for the rest of the UK in delivering meaningful and accessible benefits for those living with MS.

Improving Mental Health Support

People in Scotland living with neurological conditions, including MS, are facing what the Neurological Alliance has described as a mental health support crisis. In their report, *Together for the One in Six*, they found that 40% of adults and 35% of children and young people in Scotland reported that their mental health needs were not being met “at all.” Additionally, 80% of adults and 95% of children and young people said their neurological condition negatively impacts their mental health.

Key factors contributing to this negative impact include a lack of information about their condition, financial stress, fears about how their condition may progress, and guilt over its impact on loved ones.

Scotland does offer various mental health services, including neuropsychology, neuropsychiatry, counselling, talking therapies like Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), and face-to-face support groups. However, access to these services is uneven across health boards. Data shows that 26% of adult respondents in Scotland had been referred to neuropsychology (compared to 18% in the UK overall), yet **Scotland has the lowest referral rate for general therapy or counselling**, with only 42% compared to the UK average of 48%.

While 57% of adults in Scotland would welcome a mental health



referral, 45% of those who have accessed mental health support reported that it “made no difference.” This statistic suggests potential issues with the quality of support, dissatisfaction with services that may have been inappropriate or inadequate, or simply the complex challenges in effectively treating mental health symptoms associated with neurological conditions.

These findings underscore an urgent need for better mental health support for people with neurological conditions, especially for children and young people who are currently underserved by the system.

Our Asks

1) Provide Mental Health Support at Diagnosis and Beyond and ensure mental health support is offered at the point of diagnosis and made available throughout the management of the condition, so everyone newly diagnosed with a neurological condition has access to support.

2) Invest in Specialist Neurological Mental Health Support tailored to those with neurological conditions to provide adequate treatment and reduce mental health waiting lists.

3) Uphold High Standards in Service Quality and guarantee that the quality of mental health services is of the highest standard, ensuring that people with neurological conditions feel the true benefits of the support provided.

People with neurological conditions, including MS, are at heightened risk of mental health issues.

By making these commitments, Scotland can improve the quality of life for those with neurological conditions and build a more supportive, inclusive mental health system for everyone.

The next Scottish Government has the opportunity to speak up for people with MS and build a fairer, healthier future: one where every person with MS can live well, work, and thrive in their community.

By investing in services, reforming support systems, and prioritising neurological health, we can change lives and strengthen Scotland's position as a progressive and financially stable nation.

We call on all political parties to commit to the MS Society's vision and work with us to deliver lasting change for people with MS.