MS Society Research Strategy 2025-2029

At the MS Society, we believe in a future free from MS. And research is how we'll get there. But research is a marathon, not a sprint. Big breakthroughs take many years, even decades.

That's why it's so important we have a clear and focused research strategy. To help us make smart decisions about what we fund and to make sure we're investing in research that has best chance of leading to real progress.

Our new Research Strategy

Manage the impact of MS.
Stop it from getting worse.
Prevent it before it starts.

This strategy sets out our research priorities for the next five years. It's our roadmap for delivering the Stop MS pillar of our new organisational strategy.

It's shaped by the voices of people living with MS and consultation with the research community. We've built on the momentum of recent discoveries and on the strong foundations of our 2023-2024 Research Strategy Extension. It's ambitious, setting out what we aim to achieve in the next five years while driving towards our long-term vision.

Our principles

- To have a bold and ambitious strategy, building on existing **momentum**
- To be driven by the needs of **all** people affected by MS
- To be **embedded** within the national and international research community
- To be focused on high quality impactful research, **innovation and translation**

Our research priorities

Our strategy focuses on three priorities that reflect what matters most to people living with MS. We'll invest in high-quality, impactful research to:

1. **Manage** the impact of MS holistically to improve quality of life
2. Find new treatments to **stop** MS getting worse for everyone
3. Drive towards **preventing** MS in future generations

These priorities are underpinned by strong national and global research partnerships, and a clear focus on turning discoveries into real-world impact. They will drive all aspects of our research programme, from applicant-led funding to strategic and commissioned calls.

Manage the impact of MS

MS affects mood, memory, energy, pain, mobility, and more. And improving how we understand and manage the impact of these symptoms is so important for quality of life in all aspects.

Since the launch of our previous strategy, more effective DMTs means many people with MS are experiencing fewer relapses and slower progression. And they're living longer. So now we need to go beyond just individual symptoms. And take advantage of advances in technology to make progress. We'll focus on improving well-being and quality of life for everyone with MS by managing the impact in a way that focuses on the whole person and societal barriers. And empowers people to live well with their MS.

We'll support research into:

- Supporting mental health and wellbeing
- Novel approaches to rehabilitation, with a focus on implementation
- Maximising digital reach and technology to all with evidence-based interventions
- Developing routes to implementation for symptom management research
- Non-pharmacological approaches, including modification of lifestyle factors, to manage symptoms

Stop MS from getting worse

Our aim is to find treatments that can slow, stop, and one day even reverse the build-up of disability in MS for everyone.

Since the launch of our previous strategy, we've seen significant changes in the treatment landscape, with new treatments licenced for people with primary and secondary progressive MS. And people with progressive MS can now access more inclusive clinical trials. We also now understand that MS progression happens without relapses. We must keep the momentum going.

We'll support research that furthers our understanding of the mechanisms of progression, including:

- Deepening understanding of progression independent of relapses/smouldering MS
- Maximising opportunities from the OCTOPUS platform
- Discovering novel mechanisms and models of progression
- Exploring the role female hormones play on MS progression over a lifetime
- The impact of ageing

We'll also support research to develop and test new approaches to slowing or stopping progression, including:

- Translation of fundamental remyelination and neuroprotection research
- Stratification of treatment development, towards precision medicine
- Delivery of combination treatment, considering drug-drug interactions and impacts on lifestyle
- Development of synergistic medication
- Non-pharmacological approaches including lifestyle modifications and co-morbidities
- Biomarkers of progression for use in clinical research

Prevent MS before it starts.

We want fewer people to develop MS in the future. To make this a reality, we first need a better understanding of who's at risk of MS and how to identify them.

Since the launch of our previous strategy, the global research community has generated huge momentum around the prevention of MS, with breakthrough papers on EBV and its causal role in MS as well developing the concept of the MS prodrome. Now, developing and testing ways to prevent MS must be a global effort. And we have a key role to play.

We're seizing momentum in the research community with our UK Prevention Taskforce. And supporting novel MS risk research through our applicant-led funding.

We're commissioning research through the Prevention Taskforce to:

- Understand attitudes to risk within the MS community
- Develop a feasibility study for developing a UK prospective cohort of people at risk of MS
- Identify markers for early detection of people at risk of MS
- Understand how we recruit and retain people in 'at risk' cohorts

Underpinning infrastructure

To speed up progress across all three priorities, we need the right people, the right tools, and the right partnerships.

We'll continue building a growing, skilled and diverse MS research workforce, that'll produce tomorrow's leaders and breakthroughs. We'll work with the research community to make sure we're understanding and supporting their needs.

We'll develop strategic collaborations and influence other funders to support MS research. And we'll involve people with MS at every stage, to make sure solutions are accessible, inclusive and based on lived experience.

We'll also continue to leverage our ongoing infrastructure programmes in our Centres of Excellence, Doctoral Training Centres for Symptom Management Research, MS Register and MS Society Tissue Bank. And continue to support the research community through our ECR Network and Research Network.

Our priorities are:

- Building capacity and capability within the early career researcher (ECR) community
- Developing MS research capability in data science and technology to capitalise on developments in AI and digital technologies.
- Improve diversity and inclusivity in our research programme
- Continue to play a vital role in national and international strategic collaborations, such as the International Progressive MS Alliance, and establishing collaborations with organisations from other conditions.
- Use our influence to leverage new funds into MS research

Notes on our Research Strategy

Equity, equality, diversity and inclusion (EEDI)

We believe that diversity is the key to research excellence. And we're committed to building an inclusive research culture. Our EEDI action plan for research underpins our Research Strategy. Our online EEDI Hub outlines the work we're doing to improve EEDI across our research programme.

Scope

Our Research Strategy remains broad in scope. However, there are a few areas we will limit to ensure focused use of our funds. They include:

- Research into related disorders, like neuromyelitis optica spectrum disorder (NMOSD) or MOG antibody-associated disease (MOGAD).
    - New treatments and management strategies are evolving and it's a priority for this field to avoid misdiagnosis of MS, but what we can learn from those developments will likely have more limited benefit for treating MS progression or symptom management.
    - Research studies on these topics would need to demonstrate clear benefit for people of MS to be in scope.
- Development of new DMTs for relapses.
    - This area is well served by the pharmaceutical industry and there is limited value that our research programme could add considering the scale of funding available.
- DMT safety.
    - This is of course very important but ethically should not be on the shoulders of our limited research programme.
    - Research studies on better DMT use and management could be considered.

James Lind Alliance Priority research questions

In 2013, we carried out a James Lind Alliance priority setting partnership (PSP) to identify the research priorities of the MS community. The priorities identified through this process remain useful, but we don't plan to repeat the exercise. We acknowledge the ranking of the priority questions may have changed: some may have dropped out or new ones could find their way into the top ten. But this list of questions isn't our entire research programme.

We engage people affected by MS and healthcare professionals throughout our work and when designing our research and organisational strategies. So we don't believe that any additional insight from the PSP process would merit the time required and the financial cost of repeating it. We've made sure that the outstanding questions from the PSP process are covered within our new research strategy.

Thank you for reading our Research Strategy. If you'd like to talk about any aspect of our strategy or research programme, you can email research@mssociety.org.uk and we'd be delighted to have an informal chat.

Together we will create a future free from MS.

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

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