

A Fair Future for People with MS in Wales

MS Society Cymru Manifesto 2026

What is MS?

The MS community in Wales is bigger than ever before: there are an estimated 6,111 people living with multiple sclerosis (MS). Each week in Wales, 5 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 amongst young adults. Most people are diagnosed in their 30s or 40s. MS affects three times as many women as men, but it can affect people of all ages, races and genders.

It's vital people with MS get an early diagnosis, regular specialist support and treatment to help them manage their condition.

Recommendations

The next Welsh Government must:

- ▶ Fully implement the **Quality Statement for Neurological Conditions** with clear, measurable operational plans and deliver an **MS awareness raising** campaign at health board and national level to address health inequalities in Wales
- ▶ Implement a **Neurological Workforce Plan** to increase numbers of neurologists, specialist nurses and allied health professionals across Wales
- ▶ Increase **access to neurological rehabilitation and mental health support services** for people with MS
- ▶ Increase **investment in neurological services and social care for people with MS** to improve provisions and better meet needs, including those of unpaid carers

Implementing the Quality Statement for Neurological Conditions and Raising Awareness of MS within the Health and Social Care Sectors

Welsh Government's Quality Statement for Neurological Conditions aims to ensure everyone with or affected by a neurological condition has timely and equitable access to high quality service. Progress against this has stalled – the Wales Neurological Alliance's My Neuro Survey 2024 highlights what this means for people living with neurological conditions in Wales: **44% of adults don't feel supported by the health system, and more than a third say the services they get don't meet their needs.**

We know that people living with MS routinely face barriers when accessing GP and hospital services due to either low understanding of what it is to live with MS – including progressive or relapsing symptoms and treatment plans – or the lack of appropriate equipment like hoists, suitable drinking and eating utensils, chairs, and accessible buttons.

Social care improvements are also essential. Some people with MS can live independently for many years, but for many others, care needs can change quickly and become complex. Right now, the social care system is often too slow, too rigid and too fragmented. As a result, people with MS face unequal access to care, long waiting times, and support packages that don't fully meet their needs.

When the right support is not in place, people can end up in the hospital unnecessarily and see their physical and mental health decline faster than it should. It also puts even more pressure on Wales' unpaid carers, many of whom are already stretched to breaking point.

We know our health and care services are under huge pressure, and we recognise the progress made so far towards a National Care Service. But this work needs to move faster – and **social care must be properly involved in delivering the Quality Statement for Neurological Conditions.**

It's important that the next Welsh Government raises awareness of MS to health and social care professionals and equips services appropriately so that people with MS can access support with dignity.

We urgently need an action plan to put the Quality Statement into practice, so that wherever people with neurological conditions like MS access services in Wales, they are supported and have their needs met to live well. **Everyone affected by MS deserves the right care, at the right time, wherever they live in Wales.**

“There is a fuss with the GP every time a flu/Covid jab is needed because there is only 3 days a month I can receive any injections due to the treatment. This situation is very exhausting, and I feel like more of a burden to them than anything else.”

Person living with MS (My Neuro Survey 2024)

The next Welsh Government must fully implement the Quality Statement for Neurological Conditions with clear, measurable operational plans across Health and Social Care sectors; and raise awareness of MS at a health board and national level to address health inequalities in Wales

Implement a Long-term Neurological Workforce Plan

People in Wales living with MS are facing extensive waits for diagnosis and specialist treatment due to a shortage of neurologists and MS nurses.

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 quarter of people with MS in Wales could not see a neurologist when needed.**

Across the UK, 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**

Wales needs eight more neurologists, according to NHS Performance and Improvement research, in order to meet the Association of British Neurologists recommendation of 1 per 65,000 of the population. Worryingly, almost half of South Wales' neurologists are predicted to retire in the next decade. There's also just 1 specialist neurology nurse per 58,976 of the population.

Without immediate intervention, the gap will only grow between recommended numbers and actual figures of specialists in the neurological workforce across Wales.



A workforce strategy is essential to ensure that services are able to improve for people living with MS, and not worsen through inactivity and inevitable service delivery declines as existing staff capacity is further stretched.

“I’ve had secondary progressive MS for 20 years and ongoing support is very thin on the ground, especially since Covid.”

Person living with MS (My Neuro Survey 2024)

The next Welsh Government must implement a Neurological Workforce Plan to increase the ratio of neurologist and specialist nurses to the same level as other comparable European nations, forward planning for anticipated retirements and to reduce waiting times and enhance care quality

Improve Mental Health Support and Neurological Rehabilitation Provision

Getting psychological support is really important for people living with MS – it helps people manage their mental health and overall wellbeing. But right now, that support isn’t consistently available across Wales. My Neuro Survey found that more than 80% of people with neurological conditions in Wales say it affects their mood and mental health, and almost a third have no one to talk to about how they’re feeling. Over a third are living with a mental health comorbidity. 30% reported that care from mental health services did not meet their needs, with only 11% agreeing it did.



Many people living with MS in Wales 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 Personal Independence Payment (PIP) 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 Senedd election offers an opportunity to address these issues and ensure that people

living with MS receive the support they need to lead fulfilling lives.

When it comes to unpaid carers of people with neurological conditions, [Wales Neurological Alliance](#) reports that 43% have not been able to access mental health and wellbeing support in the previous year, and 54% reported the person they care for has mood and mental health issues.

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

The lack of consistent neurological rehabilitation pathways across Wales, to enable people with MS and other neurological conditions, to recover after relapses and to support self-management of their condition is concerning. We urge the next Welsh Government to take note of the current work being undertaken by NHS Performance and Improvement, and to use this to improve the neurorehabilitation offer across Wales.

*“Abandoned by my first MS team... discrimination at work... partner had to beg for treatment for me... what do you think life with life is like... it’s s*** and no-one cares.”*

Person living with MS (My Neuro Survey 2024)

The next Welsh Government must increase access to neurological rehabilitation and mental health support services, particularly neurology-specific provisions, for people with MS to address unmet needs

Economic Benefits to Increased Investment for Neurological Services

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 approximately 6,111 people in Wales have MS, resulting in annual costs of £213.9 million to the public finances.

By ensuring timely, recommended treatments for all eligible patients, as outlined in the Economist Impact report, Wales could reduce the disease's economic impact by an estimated 17%, saving over £36.3 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 Wales.



“I find the support helpful in terms of pain management discussion options but would like specialist pain clinics available on the NHS and also specialist physio and sport massage. I have had to pay privately; it’s basically a tax on me as I have MS and my pain symptoms respond well to sports massage. NHS waiting lists are extensive. The neurologist and nurses otherwise have been good at managing my condition and helping me.”

Person living with MS (My Neuro Survey 2024)

The next Welsh Government must increase investment in neurological services and social care for people with MS to improve provisions and better meet needs, including those of unpaid carers, increasing quality of life and delivering longer term savings for social and health spending

The next Welsh Government has the opportunity to build a fairer, healthier future for the people of Wales, one where every person with MS can live well and thrive, wherever they are in Wales.

By investing in services, reforming support systems, and prioritising neurological health, we can change lives and strengthen Wales' position as a progressive and thriving nation now and for generations to come.

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

About MS Society Cymru

We're the Wales team in the UK's largest charity for people living with MS. We're here for everyone living with MS - to provide practical help today, and the hope of a cure tomorrow. We play a leading role in research. We fight for better treatment and care. We let people with MS know they're not alone, and offer advice and support to help them.

If you would like to meet a member of the team to discuss this manifesto, please contact Senior Policy, Public Affairs and Campaigns Manager, Hilary Watson - hilary.watson@mssociety.org.uk

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