



**PLUS**  
Neuro Wellbeing

**ACT Region Newsletter**  
June 2024

*Our Values - Empowerment, Community, Expertise, Creativity and Spirited*

## The 2024 Canberra MS Mega Swim

The Canberra MS Mega Swim is a unique and exciting event that offers something for everyone... whether you're a seasoned swimmer or a beginner, you can participate and make a difference!

It is one of Australia's most popular and fastest-growing fundraising events, bringing communities together. Fun for all abilities, a team event with one goal: to swim in teams for 24 hours and raise much needed funds for people living with MS!

**START DATE:** Saturday 3 August 2024  
2:00PM

**END DATE:** Sunday 4 August 2024 2:00PM

**LOCATION:** Australian Institute of Sport,  
Leverrier Street, Bruce

Register, donate or volunteer today!

Visit <https://www.msmegachallenge.org.au/event/mega-swim-canberra> for more information



## Canberra took on the MS Walk Run + Roll again in 2024!

On Sunday 5 May, 513 participants walked, ran and rolled at Rond Terrace to celebrate the resilience and diversity of our amazing MS community and raised over \$73,000!

To each and every one of you who took part, fundraised, volunteered, supported, and shared this event, THANK YOU!!

Because of each of you, we have been able to get closer to our \$1,250,000 goal to ensure the continuation of MS Plus support and services for people living with MS and ensuring no one has to face MS Alone.



And as a bonus, fundraising has not closed yet! You can still support the 2024 MS Walk Run and Roll and help us reach our \$1.25m goal.



[Click here to donate](#)

## Thank you to Ron Brent

Thank  
you

The ACT MS community would like to recognise and thank Ron Brent for the service he has provided to our community.

Ron has been a Director at MS Plus since June 2017 and a member of its Risk, Audit and Finance Committee through this period. Ron retired from these roles in April this year. At the same time, Ron has also been a member of the ACT MS Community Engagement Council since 2014 and has also stepped down from this role last month.

We all hope you enjoy the slow down in pace and thank you for the time and effort that you have committed to our community in roles that always tend to push the boundaries of a person's time commitments. We also look forward to catching up at future social events being organised by the Engagement Council.

## Retired headmistress delivers a lesson in generosity

When she was in her 40s, Helen Dick lost three of her best friends. **Their deaths later compelled Helen to consider her legacy and ways she could help others.**

*"In my 50s, I decided to leave gifts in my Will to three charities important to me," she explains. One gift was earmarked for a cancer charity in memory of one of her friends. It took on more significance when Helen also battled cancer. Another will go to a charity focused on music, her passion. The third is for MS Plus. That gift also has personal significance because Helen, now 89, has battled multiple sclerosis (MS) for 50 years.*

Helen's MS symptoms emerged around 1974. She was working as a teacher in a private school in Melbourne. The job was demanding, and she often felt exhausted. But she also felt something else was causing her fatigue and sought medical advice. *I went through a stage where I couldn't get out of the car or go up an escalator. The doctor thought it was something to do with my inner ear. Then I got tingling down my spine.* "I had two lumbar punctures, but they didn't show anything definite. The specialist said I had a neurological disorder but was reluctant to call it MS. "My fatigue got worse. I was under stress at school, my friends died. Then I learned I definitely had MS," she recalls.

**By her late 40s, Helen's career was on an upward trajectory, and she became deputy head of the senior school. But the workload snowballed, and her neurologist urged her to quit for health reasons.** Helen resisted and moved to the headmistress post in the junior school. She did that job for 18 months. But it was too much. At 49, she reluctantly retired.

Then came the cancer. *"Everything blew up. I know stress plays a huge role in things like cancer. It likely factors in MS," she says.* She fought and beat the cancer. Meanwhile, the MS progressed. Over time, it affected Helen's mobility and activity levels. But she soldiered on, doing what she liked for as long as possible. She moved to the Mornington Peninsula for a more relaxed lifestyle. **As Helen heads towards her 90s, she thinks again about why she's leaving a gift to MS Plus.**

*"After my diagnosis, a friend went with me to an MS centre, and I met several patients. I was particularly upset about some young women who had just become pregnant and suddenly had this diagnosis. I kept thinking how terrible they got MS so early. "Those encounters prompted me to think about how I could help. I felt leaving a gift in my Will and donating to MS Plus were the things I could do.*



***"MS Plus is terrific in the way it supports people. I told them I was leaving them a gift in my Will. I said put it where it's needed most. I feel good about this decision. It's something I can do that's positive!"***

Could you help protect future generations from MS? A gift in your Will could fund research or make more services available to the MS community. If you'd like to know more, contact the MS Plus Future Planning Team on 1800 443 867. You can also email [futureplanning@msplus.org.au](mailto:futureplanning@msplus.org.au), or visit [www.myslegacy.org.au](http://www.myslegacy.org.au).



## For too long, the status quo of MS has ruined lives and torn families apart.

Every five minutes, someone in the world learns that they have multiple sclerosis (MS). It's a cruel and pervasive disease which can affect so many aspects of life – taking away a person's strength, their quality of life and even impacting their mental health. I know we can help research rise to a new level and ease the burden of MS on Australian lives.

My name is Dr Steven Petratos, Senior Research Fellow at the Regenerative Neuroscience and Development Group at Monash University. I'm currently leading a three-year research project developing novel therapies for treating MS and reversing disability.

Right now, MS researchers like myself are working feverishly to develop therapeutic interventions that can give back what MS takes away from far too many lives.



**The sooner we can conduct research, the sooner we can translate it to life-changing results for people living with MS – and those who will be diagnosed in the future.**



Ricky, was diagnosed with MS at 35. He is a man who lost his job, his family, his mobility and even his independence to MS. Sadly, with 2.9 million people living with MS around the world, Ricky's story is an all-too-common tale. But it doesn't have to be. Research has the power to challenge the status quo and put a stop to MS, for good. But we urgently need your help to fund transformative research projects that can improve the way we treat, manage and one day cure MS.

Already, my research has linked a specific protein – known as NgR1 – to degeneration in the spinal cord and optic nerve following an MS attack. Identifying this protein was a vital first step towards finding a cure to MS. It was only thanks to generous people like you that my work received the funding it needed to achieve this world-first discovery.



Right now, millions of people around the world are waiting for a cure – only research can help us find one. But the truth is, our work simply isn't possible without you. Unfortunately, funding remains one of the greatest barriers to the progress of MS research in Australia. Only around 10% of grant applications are successful. This means many high-quality research projects don't receive the funding they need to get off the ground.

Your support helps give projects like mine the opportunity to carry discoveries from the lab to the clinic – where they can have a real and measurable impact on the lives of people living with MS. By supporting MS Plus you are helping fund innovative research projects, enabling us to continue making discoveries and developing novel therapies right here in Australia.

I can't help but think of all the people whose lives have already been turned upside down by MS. People like Ricky, who despite all he has suffered, refuses to let MS keep him down. Ricky's story is an inspiring tale of humanity's power to rise above even the greatest of challenges. But it's also a tragic reminder of just how important it is that we conduct research now to stop more people like him from suffering tomorrow. Together, I believe we can rise to the challenge.

Through hard work and determination, Ricky continues to rise above the challenges of his MS. But what he needs now more than ever is a cure. Today, your generous support of MS research can help drive the discoveries that could give him one.

Dr Steven Petratos  
Senior Research Fellow, Monash University

To donate online - <https://donate.msplus.org.au/tax-appeal-2024> Or QR Code



# Canberra MS Community and Education Day

Date: **Saturday, 15 June 2024**

Time: **11am - 4pm\***

Location: **Tuggeranong Arts Centre, 137 Reed Street, Greenway, ACT**

Join the Canberra MS Community for a social day of creativity, learning and inspiration! There is a session for the newly diagnosed, creative workshops to explore the spark within and a workshop on what tools we can draw upon for our health journey. Try something new and sign up for the FREE sessions or drop in and join us for a cuppa or lunch.

- Newly diagnosed and MS supports session by MS Plus
- Meet community peers from Canberra various MS networks.
- Dance workshop
- Journal writing workshop
- Art workshop
- Board games & Book club

\* **Bookings essential due to venue.** Feel free to drop in for a cuppa between 11am – 2pm.

For FREE registration and inquiries, please click on this link <https://www.trybooking.com/CRAUG> and simply tell us which session/s you would like to be signed up for.

Don't miss out on this opportunity to thrive, learn, and connect. We can't wait to see you there!

Follow the socials on FB [@CanberraRegionMSers](#) for updates.

11.00am - 12.30pm	Art	Try something new and explore your creativity through the medium of art guided by a local talented artist. All materials provided.
11.00am – 2.00pm	Boardgame/ Book Club drop in	Canberra Monopoly anyone? A regular board games and book club weekend catch up group welcome you to enjoy a range of boardgames and books with them.
11.15am – 2.15pm	Newly diagnosed and accessing MS Support	An MS diagnoses can be overwhelming and it can be hard to know where to start. Connect with others and learn about the supports available through MS Plus and the Canberra community.
12:15pm– 1.00pm	Lunch	Drop in, say hello! Enjoy a cuppa and a bite to eat and meet the Canberra MS support groups.
12:45pm – 2.00pm	Nature Journaling	Nature journaling with Dr Fiona Boxall is a mindful observation of the natural world around us by taking the time to record personal memories and experiences through sketching. All materials are provided. You are welcome to bring your own sketch pad.
1.00pm – 1.45pm	Dance for Wellbeing	Discover the joy of dance as an expression of self through movement in a seated environment with option to travel. No dance experience necessary.
2.00pm – 4.00pm	Living Well Toolkit Workshop	Canberra based Elle Pendrick, founder of 'Adulting Well', is committed to empowering and educating people to navigate life with a chronic illness and thrive. In this workshop, Elle shares a toolkit she has developed from her lifelong journey with CHD to help others to gain skills, resilience and mindset.

# what's on

The latest programs and updates from client engagement and wellbeing



**JUNE 2024**

10—16 June is International Men's Health Week! Throughout June we have taken the opportunity to highlight the importance of men's health and promote and support the health and wellbeing of men in our community. Join us for a live webinar talking all things men's health. Our podcast series will have new episodes that are focused on the experience of being a man with MS and some of the unique challenges. Gain expert insights, practical advice, and community support on managing symptoms, mental health, sexual function, and overall wellbeing. Don't miss out on valuable resources and connections during this important month!

## Upcoming MS Plus webinars

### **Men's health: what every man should know!**

**13 June 2024, 12.30 pm – 1.30 pm AEDT.**



During Men's Health Week, join us for a live webinar featuring Nurse Practitioner Luke Mitchell. Luke is passionate about all areas of men's health, with a special interest in holistic sexual health and rehabilitation. Luke has master's degrees in public health and clinical nursing and has recently qualified as a nurse practitioner. He has over ten years of experience in urology and sexual health. Luke currently sits as an active member on the Healthy Male Health Practitioners advisory board and Chairs the Australian and New Zealand Urological Nurses Society (ANZUNS) Sexual Health Special Interest Group. Luke will be joined by our own very experienced MS Nurse, Michael Mortenson.

In the webinar, Luke and Michael will cover essential men's health topics, including mental health, heart health, MS symptoms that commonly affect men and sexual health. The session focuses on building your knowledge and understanding, as well as getting practical advice to better manage these crucial aspects of men's health. Some of the topics covered are not easy to discuss, but to ensure your privacy and make you feel safe, questions can be asked without your name being shared.

**[Register Now!](#)**

## **Podcast spotlight: Men's health**



### **Men at Work**

Many men living with MS face daily struggles and challenges in the workplace for a variety of reasons. In this podcast, Jeff Lawrance from our employment support team tackles these challenges and talks about the barriers that men with MS face in the workplace. He offers invaluable advice and strategies to help you overcome these barriers and assist you in making the changes to feel better at work. **[Listen here!](#)**

### **Being a dad with MS**

Parenting can be hectic at the best of times. If you're living with MS, trying to juggle your needs and those of your partner and your children brings additional challenges. Join Silas as he shares his experience of being a busy dad living with MS. Silas describes the various strategies he has put in place that support him and his family to enjoy life and live well. **[Listen here!](#)**



## Catch up on recent podcasts:

### MS diagnosis and trauma – the unspoken shadow to chronic conditions



Psychotherapist Katie Willard Virant discusses the impact of diagnosis, and how this can be source of trauma, even years later. Katie outlines the importance of these trauma responses, how to recognise these responses in yourself and how post-traumatic growth and healing can be achieved. Katie shares practical advice on where and how to seek support and how those around you can show you the love and support you need. [Listen now!](#)

### Feeling sick, faking well – with psychotherapist Katie Willard Virant

Psychotherapist Katie Willard Virant discusses the challenges of chronic illness and the societal pressure to appear well despite having health struggles. We discuss how this can affect daily life for people living with chronic illness, and Katie shares advice on authenticity and taking space despite chronic illness.

[Listen now!](#)

The MS Boost will be in addition to our current series, so make sure you're following [MS Podcasts](#) on your preferred player like [Apple Podcasts](#) or [Spotify](#) to be the first to know when new episodes are released

## Information for people supporting someone with MS

### The *Plus Navigate: Friends & Family* program is for people who support someone with MS.

Over two 75-minute sessions, an MS expert will guide discussions, provide information, links to resources and answer any questions.

We'll cover a range of topics including:

- \* understanding MS
- \* navigating the health system
- \* where to access help and support
- \* how to take care of yourself

[Register now](#)

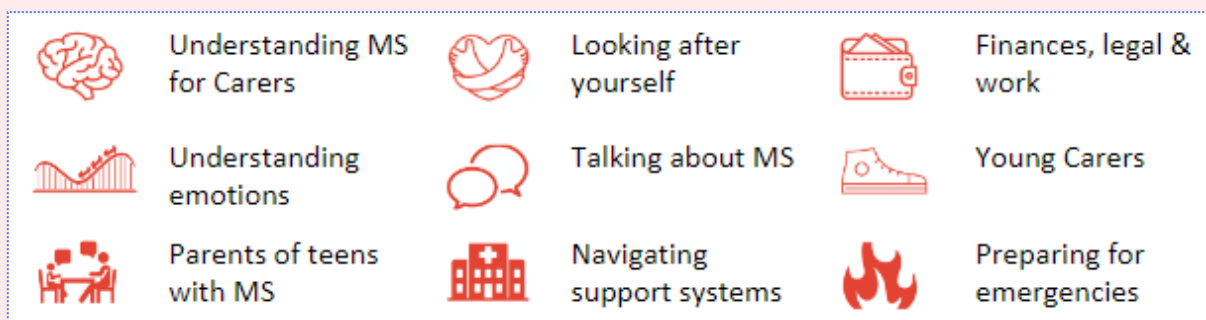
### Young Carers: Navigating Responsibilities and Wellbeing

Young carers play a significant role in our society, often shouldering responsibilities beyond their years. Each young carer has unique circumstances and responsibilities. Clinical Psychologist, Nicola Palfrey from headspace National talks about the world of young carers, their challenges, and the importance of looking after themselves to manage their daily life.

[Watch here](#)

### Carers, Family & Friends Toolkit

This online resource provides a range of information and practical tips specifically designed for people who are supporting someone with MS. Topics include:



[Explore the toolkit here](#)

## Exercise Classes at Gloria McKerrow House

### Be Better Balanced

A combination of chair and circuit-based exercises designed for individuals who can still walk but have challenges with balance, stamina, and overall mobility. Classes are comprehensive and well-paced, ensuring they are enjoyable for everyone.

**When:** Tuesdays 9.30am — 10.30am  
Thursdays 10.00am – 11.00am (online available)

### Wheels in Motion

A class designed for people in wheelchairs or who are having difficulty walking. In this class the focus is on upper body mobility as well as making use of a motorised exercise bike for those it suits. This is a small group and where possible individual work is done on each person to mobilise leg movement.

**When:** Thursdays 11.00am – 12.00pm **Cost:** \$10.00 per class or 10 classes for \$90.00

*Please call 1800 042 138 to register*



### Online Mindfulness Meditation

*...for people with Multiple Sclerosis and other neurological conditions.*

Join us every Friday afternoon, from 3:30pm - 4:30pm and experience the relaxing benefits of meditation.

Email Helen Woodbridge ([woodbridgehelen@hotmail.com](mailto:woodbridgehelen@hotmail.com)) and she'll send you a Zoom link for the session every Friday. Carers and family also welcome!

## Peer Support

We have two Peer Support Groups available in the ACT, and new members are welcome at any time.

### People with MS (PwMS) Taking Control Group

Our group meets twice a month and seeks to connect people living with MS in the Canberra region, for friendship and information sharing, with a focus on living well with MS.

**Meets:** 1. 12.30 to 2.00pm - 2nd Friday, 14 June 2024 **Venue:** Zoom only  
2. 12.30 to 2.00pm - Last Friday, 28 June 2024 **Venue:** Gloria McKerrow House, Deakin

Contact Vanessa Fanning/Mary Webb at [pwmstcg@gmail.com](mailto:pwmstcg@gmail.com) to be added to our email list, and/or join our Facebook group 'Canberra Region MSers'. In line with privacy principles, you can unsubscribe at any time.

### ACT Weekend MS Peer Support Group

**Meets:** 10am, 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of each month **Venue:** ACT Café, Canberra

Contact Plus Connect on 1800 042 138

## Tabletop Games

This year the group will be operating every second month — No prior knowledge required!

**When:** Saturday 15 June 2024, MS Community & Education Day

**Where:** Tuggeranong Arts Centre, 137 Reed St, Greenway ACT

**Time:** 11:00—2:00pm, come and go at your leisure

Please register your interest at [pwmstabletop@gmail.com](mailto:pwmstabletop@gmail.com) for updates.

*\* Family, friends and carers are also welcome \**

