

MS-UK Strategic Plan



Reviewed 2020

Welcome!

MS-UK is a national charity formed in 1993. We are here for people affected by multiple sclerosis – that’s around 130,000 people in the UK and 2.3 million worldwide.

MS is a condition that affects the central nervous system – your brain and spinal cord. There is currently no cure. The symptoms people experience vary greatly from person to person and over time. Such symptoms may include fatigue, pain, sensory problems such as with vision, cognition difficulties and issues with bodily functions such as speech and swallowing and bladder and bowel.

Just as there is no cure, there is also no definitive understanding of the cause of MS. This means that there is no consensus around how to treat or manage MS, doubling the uncertainty in people’s lives and those around them.

This is why MS-UK has





always been at the forefront of promoting choice, of providing people with all the information and support they need to live life as they wish to with multiple sclerosis; whether that be through drugs, complementary therapies, lifestyle changes, a mixture of these or none at all. We will always respect people's rights to make informed decisions for themselves.



This strategy was originally built upon the foundations created during our last strategic period – a charity that really listens to those we are here to support, provides professional services and is robust, efficient and effective.



Whilst we remain committed to this strategy, the pandemic has made it necessary to review our plans. The impact of COVID-19 on our operations and our ability can not be underestimated. These have been and will continue to be very



challenging times. We derive much of our income from fundraising events and are uncertain when these will return. The longer-term impact on our economy is unknown, but also likely to mean that other income sources will be negatively impacted too.

However, the rapid use and acceptance of digital technology presents us with new opportunities that were not seen as possible. Whilst we do not wish to leave non-digital users behind, there is scope for us to look at what we are able to offer the MS community and reconsider the best way to do so, thereby increasing the numbers of people we are able to support, and how we can support them.



As we look to the next three years we will be focusing on what the MS community told us would make the biggest difference to them as part of our original strategy, and also carrying on this conversation with the MS community so we can adapt to their changing needs.



Our vision

Our hope for the future

A world where people affected by multiple sclerosis live healthier and happier lives

Our mission

The difference we want to make

To improve understanding of multiple sclerosis and provide support where it is needed most

Our values

What we will hold true in all that we do

Community-led

The voices of people affected by multiple sclerosis inform all our work

Independent

We do not accept funding from sources that may, or can be perceived to, jeopardise our ability to act in the best interests of people affected by MS

Professional

We are knowledgeable and provide high quality services

Unbiased

We will always be balanced in the information we share

Non-judgmental

We respect an individual's right to make choices for themselves

Supportive

We treat everyone fairly, with respect, care and compassion

How we developed our original strategy

We knew from the outset that we wanted this strategy to be community-led. We also knew that if we wanted to involve people in a meaningful way, this would take time. So in February 2018 the board agreed a plan of how we would do just that. Needless to say, the plan did not go completely as expected, but we are confident that we have produced a strategy that has the wishes of people affected by MS at its core.

So what did we do?

- 1 Held meetings with staff and board members to review our vision, mission and values. Consultation with our virtual insights panel and focus groups to test these ideas. Revisited and refined our vision and values based on their feedback
- 2 Determined our strengths and weaknesses and our opportunities and potential threats
- 3 Researched the 'players' in our field and thought hard about who we are here to support
- 4 Asked our community – what is the biggest difference we could make for them today, that they cannot get anywhere else (along with some other questions) – we ran surveys and held focus groups
- 5 Board and management team met and considered all of this information and agreed the key priorities for MS-UK for the next three years

How we reviewed our strategy

From the beginning of the pandemic the board met regularly to discuss future options for MS-UK. It was clear that our vision, mission and values were still relevant and needed to be held at the forefront of any decision making. We conducted a new SWOT analysis and reassessed our new environment.

What we discovered was that we were not looking at developing new strategy, but rather refreshing our current strategy. We still wanted to accomplish much of the same, but what has changed, is how we might go about that; what methods and channels we might employ to support people affected by MS to live happier and healthier lives, in the best way we can, given our new challenges and opportunities.



Our strategic priorities



1 Supporting people affected by multiple sclerosis to be healthier and happier

Our strategy review highlighted to us that we are well-positioned to provide a wider range of support and an even more holistic approach to our services. During the next three years, we will be working closely with our Virtual Insights Panel and the wider MS community to develop and deliver both our existing, and new services. We are committed to continuing our three national services – the MS-UK Helpline, MS-UK Counselling and New Pathways Magazine. We will also look to expand upon our early work on providing both MS-tailored exercise and mindfulness courses. Beyond this, we intend to run a series of pilots to explore what more we could be doing to support people affected by MS online with their physical, social and mental health.

During the consultation for our original strategy, the most talked-about gap for people affected by MS and felt across the UK was loneliness and isolation. People told us that there was simply not enough support to overcome the barriers contributing toward their isolation and not enough available to them to help them feel a part of something, connected to the world and less lonely. Since then, we have published our research into the experiences of loneliness and isolation in the MS community and have set out detailed recommendations of what we and others can do to better support people. These findings have been woven into the plans for the future.



2 **Increasing understanding of multiple sclerosis**

The consultation work we carried out brought home to us just how important an increased understanding of MS is to the community. We need to continue and further develop our work to increase people's understanding of their condition and give them everything they need to make informed choices about how they wish to live with MS. To do this we need to engage more deeply with people affected by MS so we can learn from them, and share that learning.

But we also know we need to increase the understanding of MS for those who do not have the condition and will use MS Awareness week as an opportunity to target specific areas of audiences.

We will also develop national campaigns and address the specific concerns raised by the MS community, including the realities of living with hidden symptoms, the experience of loneliness and isolation and how to support one another, tackling stigma and self-help.

3 **Managing our charity as efficiently and effectively as possible**

Underpinning all that we do is the need to be efficient and effective. We owe it to our beneficiaries, supporters, staff and volunteers to operate in a way that means we are making the most of every penny that is entrusted to us. This means ensuring that not only are we well-run today, but that we are also fit for the future.

We will continue to invest in the good governance of the charity and review our performance as well as ensure that we are

financially robust. We will also look after and develop our staff and volunteers as we know that we cannot do what we need to without them.

We will develop complementary marketing and fundraising activities to support our work and take full advantage of all that the digital world can offer.

Final words

MS-UK recognises the importance of being led by those we are here to support – the MS community. We endeavour to deliver on what the community tells us will have the greatest impact on their lives. It only leaves us to say thank you so very much to those that attended focus groups, sent us emails, called us and completed surveys – we can only do our best with your insight. We hope to use your voices, that you generously shared with us, to make a real difference to the lives of people affected by multiple sclerosis.



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