

## **Tamworth volunteer Marianne Gaul AM honoured with MS Australia Advocate Award**

**4 FEBRUARY 2025:** Tamworth's Marianne Gaul AM, an acclaimed nurse and dedicated volunteer, has been awarded the 2024 MS Advocate Award by MS Australia.

The national award celebrates people who raise awareness about multiple sclerosis (MS) and champion the needs of those living with the condition.

Marianne's exceptional leadership, advocacy, and volunteer work have profoundly improved the lives of people with MS in Tamworth and across NSW, ACT and VIC, embodying the spirit of this award.

MS Australia CEO Rohan Greenland praised Marianne's selfless dedication to the MS community, recognising her invaluable support to others living with the condition.

"The expansion of MS Australia's awards program reflects our commitment to celebrating incredible people who dedicate themselves to improving the lives of people living with MS," Mr Greenland said.

"Marianne embodies the true spirit of advocacy. Her dedication to peer support, fundraising, and community leadership has made a real and lasting difference to so many lives."

Diagnosed with MS in 2007 at the peak of her 45-year nursing career, Marianne faced her condition with the same commitment to care and service that defined her professional life.

"At that time, I was employed as a Clinical Nurse Consultant for Rural Emergency Care, a position I held for 25 years, supporting clinicians in 20 rural hospitals in northern NSW," Marianne said.

Marianne retired in 2013 after a career devoted to improving rural healthcare and was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for her services to nursing. However, her commitment to helping others didn't end with her professional career.

She found fulfilment in volunteering—spending 10 years with a local Lions Club before joining MS Plus Peer Support, where she was inspired by her own experience with MS to support others facing similar challenges.

"My passion is supporting people living with MS," Marianne said. "I find much gratitude and satisfaction in facilitating groups, offering one-on-one support, and helping people navigate the challenges of living with MS."

Through MS Plus, Marianne facilitates group sessions, provides individual telephone support, and leads volunteer catch-ups, ensuring people with MS receive emotional and practical assistance while fostering collaboration among the team of volunteers.

Jack, an MS peer support community member, remarked, "Marianne is the most beautiful soul who has true empathy and compassion and is always open and willing to share her experience with others so that she can give back to those who may be struggling."

Marianne is also an enthusiastic participant and fundraiser for The May 50K, using the event to raise vital funds for MS research and give back to her local community. "We both have participated in every May 50K and support each other's progress," shared Ray, an MS peer support community member. "She picks up all the garbage she sees on her walks, beautifying Tamworth while wearing her bright red May 50K t-shirt."

Marianne's humility and generosity shone through as she accepted the 2024 MS Advocate Award.

"This award is truly humbling," Marianne said. "It acknowledges the commitment I have made to supporting and enriching the lives of people with MS. However, I believe this award should be shared with all the MS Plus Peer Support volunteers, who collectively make such a profound and positive impact."

Of her many accomplishments, Marianne is most proud of the meaningful connections she has built within the MS community.

"It's very rewarding to see what a difference you can make to people's lives through monthly meetings via MS Teams, a friendly phone call, or a card that acknowledges a special occasion such as a birthday or becoming a grandparent," she said.

## About the MS Australia Awards

The MS Australia Awards honour individuals who have made exceptional contributions to improving the lives of people living with MS.

In 2024, MS Australia expanded its annual awards program, introducing two new awards open to public nomination, the MS Research Award and the MS Advocacy Award.

These awards complement the program's legacy of celebrating outstanding service through the prestigious John Studdy Award.

This year's other award recipients include:

- **MS Research Award: Professor Jeannette Lechner-Scott, Newcastle, NSW**

Professor Lechner-Scott is a globally recognised leader in MS research, with decades of groundbreaking work spanning disease mechanisms, biomarkers, and clinical trials. Her current studies, including the impact of pregnancy on MS, continue to inform treatment strategies and improve patient care.



- **John Studdy Award: Lynda Whitton, Bunbury, WA**

Lynda has dedicated three decades to advocacy, leadership, and fundraising in the MS community. As President of the Bunbury Outreach Group and founder of the Bunbury Swim fundraising event, she has made a profound difference in Western Australia and beyond, helping to establish vital support networks and services.

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## **About MS**

MS is the most common acquired chronic neurological disease affecting young adults, often diagnosed between the ages of 20 to 40 and, in Australia, affects three times more women than men. As yet, there is no cure. There is no known single cause of MS, but many genetic and environmental factors have been shown to contribute to its development.

In MS, the body's own immune system mistakenly attacks and damages the fatty material – called myelin – around the nerves. Myelin is important for protecting and insulating nerves so that the electrical messages that the brain sends to the rest of the body, travel quickly and efficiently.

As the myelin breaks down during an MS attack – a process called demyelination – patches of nerves become exposed and then scarred, which renders the nerves unable to communicate messages properly and at risk of subsequent degeneration. This means that the brain cannot talk to other parts of the body, resulting in a range of symptoms that can include a loss of motor function (e.g., walking and hand and arm function, loss of sensation, pain, vision changes and changes to thinking and memory).

## **About MS Australia**

MS Australia is Australia's national multiple sclerosis (MS) not-for-profit organisation that empowers researchers to identify ways to treat, prevent and cure MS, seeks sustained and systemic policy change via advocacy, and acts as the national champion for Australia's community of people affected by MS.

MS Australia represents and collaborates with its state and territory MS Member Organisations, people with MS, their carers, families and friends and various national and international bodies to:

- Fund, coordinate, educate and advocate for MS research as part of the worldwide effort to solve MS
- Provide the latest evidence-based information and resources
- Help meet the needs of people affected by MS.