

**MND Australia**

**Background Information on**

**Motor Neurone Disease**

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To contact the MND Association in your state or territory  
National freecall: 1800 777 175



# MOTOR NEURONE DISEASE

- Motor neurone disease (MND) is the name given to a group of diseases in which motor neurones progressively die. Motor neurones are nerve cells that control the movement of voluntary muscles, that is, muscles that are under conscious control. These include all the muscles of the arms, legs, back and neck and of speech, swallowing and breathing.
- MND is also known as Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) and Lou Gehrig's disease in other parts of the world.
- With no nerves to activate them, muscles gradually weaken and waste, and paralysis ensues. Weakness is often seen first in the hands or feet, or the first sign may be swallowing difficulty or slurred speech. Muscle twitching and/or cramps may also occur.
- In most cases the senses are not affected.
- 50% of people with MND may experience some change in cognition, language, behaviour and personality. Most people experience relatively mild changes. However, a small proportion (5–15%) will show more significant changes and will receive a diagnosis of 'motor neurone disease with frontotemporal dementia' or MND/ FTD.
- MND affects each person differently in respect of initial symptoms, rate and pattern of progression, and survival time. There are no remissions.
- Average survival time after diagnosis is 2.5 years\* (Deloitte Access Economics report [Economic analysis of MND in Australia](#), 2015), but a minority of people will survive 5 years or more.
- Progression of MND is rapid, creating high levels of disability and consequent needs for support. People with MND need assistance with feeding, communication, movement, transferring, toileting, and breathing. MND has an impact on all activities of living.
- The key feature of the disease is the speed of progression, which poses huge problems of adjustment for people who have MND, an escalating burden on carers and families, and a challenge to those who are involved in meeting the variable and complex care needs.
- MND is not contagious.
- The causes of the majority of cases of MND remain unknown. However about 5 to 10% of cases are inherited (familial) and the genetic fault of about 60% of these cases is now known in Australian families.
- Researchers from around the world are studying genetics; toxins; chemicals by which nerve cells are controlled and communicate; the use of stem cells; and the growth, repair and ageing of motor neurons. The provision of better care is also being investigated.
- The blue cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*) was adopted by MND Australia as the national symbol of hope for MND, because of its fragile appearance but hardy nature. Like the cornflower, people living with MND show remarkable strength in coping with a devastating disease. It was first adopted by the ALS Society of Canada and is used by a number of countries worldwide including South Africa and New Zealand.

## MND around the world

- MND occurs in all countries of the world. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity or demographic.
- Over 420,000 of the world's people are living with MND. There are approximately 140,000 cases diagnosed worldwide each year. That is 384 new cases every day. (*International Alliance of ALS/MND Associations*)
- MND is not a disease of ageing and can affect adults at any age, although the peak age of onset is during the fifties and sixties. Men are affected slightly more often than women.
- Riluzole is the only treatment that has been demonstrated in trials to extend life expectancy in people living with MND. It is registered in Australia and is included in the PBS.
- Global Day is marked annually on 21 June as the international day of recognition for ALS/MND

## In Australia

- More than 2,000 people are living with MND (Deloitte Access Economics report [Economic analysis of MND in Australia](#), 2015)
- In 2014, 680 people with MND died (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2014)
- The prevalence of MND was 8.7 per 100,000 people in 2015 or 1 per 11,434 Australians (Deloitte Access Economics report [Economic analysis of MND in Australia](#), 2015)
- Mean time from onset to confirmation of diagnosis is 10 to 18 months (Deloitte Access Economics report [Economic analysis of MND in Australia](#), 2015)
- Approximately 58% of people with MND are under the age of 65 (Deloitte Access Economics report [Economic analysis of MND in Australia](#), 2015)
- The total cost of MND in Australia was \$2.37 billion in 2015. This equates to \$1.1 million per person (Deloitte Access Economics report [Economic analysis of MND in Australia](#), 2015)
- The six State MND Associations provide support in all states and territories
- 50% of the people supported by State MND Associations are over the age of 65
- MND Australia and its research arm, MND Research Institute of Australia (MNDRIA), form one national body that represents both care and research
- MNDRIA awarded \$3.75 million for 35 new MND research grants to commence in 2017. This vital source of funding is only possible thanks to the generous support of State MND Associations, donors and bequestors.
- During 2015/16 State MND Associations provided:
  - care, information and support for 1,363 people living with MND
  - support and information for over 831 people newly diagnosed with MND
  - support for the families of the 575 people registered with an MND association who died
  - over 4,747 items of equipment to people living with MND
  - 3,745 information packs on MND to people living with MND, carers and health, disability, aged, palliative professionals and community care providers
  - \$804,861 for MND-specific research through MNDRIA

## Summary of needs for people with MND

- Early diagnosis given by a neurologist expert in MND
- Counselling and support at and following diagnosis
- Early access to MND Associations for information, support and referral to services
- Early access to palliative care services
- Early and timely intervention and access to a range of services based on the needs of the individual and their family including:
  - specialist physicians and allied health
  - equipment to maintain independence, communication, feeding and breathing
  - flexible and timely respite for carers
  - personal home care and support
  - support from volunteers when appropriate
- Coordinated multidisciplinary care from a team of professionals
- Urgent response and regular review – waiting lists are not appropriate
- MND specific information and education and ongoing support for carers of people living with MND
- MND specific information and education, support, adequate resources and backup for health professionals and service providers

## Why MND Week?

MND Week is celebrated nationally in the first full week of May to raise awareness of the needs of people living with MND and their family. It is a time to acknowledge the MND community and people living with MND today and to remember those who have died. In 2017 MND Week is 7–13 May.

## Why Global Day?

Every year the International Alliance of ALS/MND Associations celebrates 21 June as the global day of recognition of ALS/MND – a disease that affects people in every country of the globe. June 21 is a solstice – a turning point – and each year the ALS/MND community undertake a range of activities to express their hope that this day will be another turning point in the search for cause, treatment and cure of MND.

## Some famous people who are living with or have died from MND include:

- Percy Cerutti – Australian athletics coach
- Lord Leonard Cheshire – VC
- Ronnie Corbett – comedian
- Neale Daniher – former AFL player, coach and mentor
- Ron Edgeworth – musician
- Scott Gale – Balmain rugby league player
- Pro Hart – painter
- Stephen Hawking – mathematician, physicist and author
- Stephen Hillenburg – creator of the animated series *Spongebob Squarepants*
- James Kemsley – cartoonist
- Charles Mingus – jazz composer and bassist,
- Richard Morgan – actor
- David Niven – actor
- Morrie Schwartz – American Professor of Sociology, media personality and author, who was the subject of the international best-selling book, “Tuesdays with Morrie”
- Mao Tse Tung – revolutionary leader of China
- Joost van der Westhuizen – South African rugby union player
- Gary West – Cycling Australia's head track sprint coach

## Summary of facts:

- FACT** *MND is a rapidly progressive, terminal neurological disease*  
**FACT** *There is no known cure and no effective treatment for MND - yet*  
**FACT** *Each day in Australia two people die from MND*  
**FACT** *Each day in Australia two people are diagnosed with MND*  
**FACT** *People with MND progressively lose the use of their limbs and ability to speak, swallow and breathe, whilst their mind and senses usually remain intact*  
**FACT** *Average life expectancy is 2.5 years*  
**FACT** *More than 2,000 people have MND in Australia and thousands more families and carers live daily with the effects of MND*

## More about MND Australia and the State MND Associations

MND Australia is the national peak advocate for MND. Together with the State MND Associations we advance, promote and influence MND care and research with a vision to achieving a world without MND. MND Australia works to improve the lives of all Australians impacted by motor neurone disease by influencing policy, providing trusted information, raising awareness and promoting and funding the best research.

The six state Associations, representing all states and territories, are members of MND Australia. The MND Research Institute of Australia (MNDRIA) is the research arm of MND Australia. The MND Association of New Zealand is an associate member of MND Australia.

Research is the only way that we can change the future of motor neurone disease (MND). **Every dollar** we receive for research is directed to our research arm, the MND Research Institute of Australia, (MNDRIA) and invested in research with the best chance of understanding the causes, developing effective treatments and finding a cure for MND. We believe that it is only a matter of time and hard work before we unravel MND's mystery. A cure is out there and our researchers are working hard to find it.

## Until there is a cure, there is care

The key to quality and length of life for people living with MND lies in access to the best possible, evidence-based care including coordinated multidisciplinary clinics/care, riluzole, non-invasive ventilation, nutritional support and support and services from the State MND Associations.

The State MND Associations support over 80% of all people diagnosed with MND in Australia. The State Association support services staff and MND advisors aim to provide some or all of the following services:

- information
- active assistance to members
- home visits and ongoing support
- assistance in accessing MND clinics and local services
- assistance in development of National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) plans and planning
- equipment provision or assistance in accessing equipment from government agencies
- peer support, support groups and information programs
- carer workshops
- information and education for health and community care professionals
- local advocacy and influencing
- volunteers

## Case studies

MND Australia and the State MND Associations have a database of individuals from around Australia who would like to share their story about living with MND. Please contact us to discuss your requirements and organise an interview.

**More Information:** MND Australia: [www.mndaustralia.org.au](http://www.mndaustralia.org.au)

**Email:** [info@mndaustralia.org.au](mailto:info@mndaustralia.org.au)