



PLUS
Neuro Wellbeing



**Financial
Wellbeing
Finding support**

About this resource

Whether you are newly diagnosed, or have lived with a chronic health condition for a while, having a good grasp on your financial situation now and a plan for the future is important in maintaining your financial wellbeing.

This reference guide is a list of available supports in the MS Plus service area of Victoria, NSW, ACT and Tasmania.

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Disclaimer: Any advice or information in this publication is of a general nature only and has not taken into account your personal objectives, financial situation and needs. Because of that, before acting on the advice, you should consider its appropriateness to you, having regard to your personal objectives, financial situation and needs.

Financial Wellbeing

3 questions to ask yourself

If my household income decreases, could I comfortably meet my current expenses?

Consider speaking with a licensed Financial Advisor to look at short, medium and long-term financial goals to protect yourself financially and give you peace of mind should MS or other life events change your financial situation. They can explore a range of options from superannuation to insurance, including early access to superannuation and Centrelink assistance options. Your Financial Advisor considers your expenses and works with you to develop a budget.

I'm still working but worried about income if I need to stop or reduce hours?

Having a pre-existing medical condition can affect your ability to get Income Protection or Total Permanent Disability coverage under new insurance policies. Do a check of your current insurance policies (often found within your superannuation policies) and if covered learn how to keep them active and under what circumstances you might be able to claim, eg, wait periods. If you have multiple policies, assess their criteria and seek advice before closing any.

I am struggling with the cost of living and have fallen behind on payments, what should I do?

- Seek help for debt early. Financial Counsellors are free, professional and confidential
- Avoid falling into a credit trap such as credit cards and Buy Now Pay Later providers
- Review your regular service provider contracts and shop around for a better deal, eg. gas and electricity, phone and internet, car and home insurances
- Pay attention to spending 'leaks' in your budget eg. convenience food or unused subscription or membership services
- Get support to make a plan for your future financial wellbeing

“It’s important for everyone to understand their personal financial situation. Given the overwhelm that can come with the initial diagnosis though, it may not be something that needs to happen immediately. But, if applicable, just knowing that there are options available may offer peace of mind. Once your head is a little clearer, treatment decisions have been made and there’s less on your mind, it’s definitely worth reviewing the overall situation.”

- Mel Lever, person living with MS and licenced Financial Advisor



Service and support finders

There are many organisations that provide emergency welfare and material aid support but as they vary from region to region, it can seem difficult to navigate. Online tools can help you find everything from material aid through to ways to save money.

Ask Izzy

Finds charities and services by location – services include food relief, housing, Money help, Support and Counselling, family violence services, everyday needs (clothing, showers etc), health services, advice and advocacy, work and learning

askizzy.org.au

Services Australia Payment and Services Finder

An online tool allowing users to:

- search eligibility for government payments and concession cards
- provide information about community organisations by location.

Search **'service and payment finder'** in your internet search engine to use this interactive tool.

DSS Grants Service Directory

Directory of grants and community organisations providing services which can be filtered by need (e.g. emergency relief, food relief, financial counselling, Money Support Hub) and location.

serviceproviders.dss.gov.au

Concession Finders by State & Territory

NSW – Cost of Living Hub

nsw.gov.au/money-and-taxes/cost-of-living-hub

ACT – Cost of Living Support

act.gov.au/money-and-tax/cost-of-living-support

VIC – Concessions and Benefits finder

services.dffh.vic.gov.au/concessions-and-benefits

TAS – Concessions Tasmania

concessions.tas.gov.au

Financial counsellors & advisors

Financial counselling is usually a free service that supports people in or facing financial hardship. Financial Advice however is usually a fee-based service to futureproof financial wellbeing. Always use an accredited service and seek help early.

Pro Bono Financial Advice Network

Eligible clients are matched with licensed Financial Advisors who provide advice and assistance with matters such as superannuation insurance or Centrelink claims, retirement planning and more.

Potential clients need to live with MS and be experiencing financial hardship.

probonoadvice.com.au

“Mortgages are generally one of our biggest expenses, particularly the interest that you pay on a mortgage. So, what you really want to do is make sure that you're getting the best interest rate deal.

Getting that information, being armed with what you're paying, what potential options are, is a really good start before you go and approach your bank and ask for a discount.

Now, if the discount is not going to come and the bank is not going to help, then go to another bank, get an offer, and you might actually find that your existing bank is willing to give you that deal as well. It's worth the effort if it works.”

Nicola Beswick, Financial Advisor & Chair and Director of the Pro Bono Financial Advice Network

Financial Counsellors

Financial Counselling services are provided through many local community organisations. They provide confidential information and advice around your rights, can help you with debt management and provide budgeting support. Directories to find your local financial counselling service can be found via these websites:

National Debt Helpline

ndh.org.au

MoneySmart

Both directories include contact details for specialist financial counselling such as for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, small business, rural communities.

moneysmart.gov.au





Food & emergency relief

When times are tough financially, accessing food relief can ensure that money which would otherwise be spent on groceries, is able to be put towards other cost of living expenses such as petrol, bills or medical costs. Similarly, in times of emergency, there are various organisations that provide assistance during difficult times.

Food relief comes in different forms such as cooked community meals or access to community pantries, food hampers and sometimes supermarket vouchers.

Most food relief services are organised by local community groups supported by volunteers.

To find local providers, both Food Bank and OzHarvest provide search directories.

Food Bank

foodbank.org.au

OzHarvest

ozharvest.org

St Vincent de Paul Society

The St Vincent de Paul Society (Vinnies) is one of many reputable emergency relief organisations.

It gets a special mention in this resource as in many areas volunteers are able to visit people in their own homes to provide assistance. This is particularly helpful when mobility is limited.

13 18 12

vinnies.org.au

From the national page, state and territory based services and contact numbers can be searched.



There is no shame in seeking the help you need. With the rising cost of living, more and more Australians who were once financially secure are now finding themselves in need of financial support and food relief.

Helplines

Helplines offer a gentle way to access support services from the comfort of your home and the conversations are confidential. Many services now provide webchat options, which can be a preferred way of seeking support.



National Debt Helpline

Free independent and confidential information and advice by phone and webchat.

This service will refer on to a local financial counselling service if ongoing support is required.

1800 007 007
ndh.org.au

National Gambling Helpline

Free, professional and confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Support includes 24/7 webchat and tools such as self help modules

1800 858 858
gamblinghelponline.org.au

Mob Strong Debt Helpline

Free legal advice service about money matters for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from anywhere in Australia.

1800 808 488
financialrights.org.au/getting-help/mob-strong-debt-help

The Financial Independence Hub

1300 050 150
goodshep.org.au/services/fih

Free and confidential support for people who have experienced any form of financial abuse.



If you find yourself in financial difficulty, one of the best tips is to seek help early.

Not only can it prevent the problem getting worse but the peace-of-mind and the relief from anxiety and stress will be invaluable – especially if you are living with a condition such as MS.

As a general rule, as long as you are open in your communication with your providers, in many cases, there will be options for support.

Getting some initial advice from a helpline is a great start – and it's free.

No Interest Loans Schemes (NILS)

When an unexpected expense arises, there are alternative options to Buy Now Pay Later services, unscrupulous pay-day lenders or rent-to-buy contracts.

NILS programs provide loans for low income households with 0% interest and no fees or charges.

Loans are paid directly for an invoice to the provider (no cash) and can be used for a range of essential costs from new appliances, car repairs, funeral costs and rent in advance.

A number of community agencies now provide NILS programs, with Good Shepherd, the pioneer of community NILS, offering a directory to help locate local services.

goodshep.org.au/services/nils

“One thing I would say is please stay away from the buy now pay later type sites. The interest you have to pay on those things can be quite high and can have such a huge detrimental impact on people's overall situations, particularly in the future when you have to pay these things.”

- Nicola Beswick, Financial Advisor & Chair and Director of the Pro Bono Financial Advice Network





Support with Centrelink

Each state and territory has a community legal service that specialises in providing Social Security (Centrelink) advice, and where appropriate, representation.

Social Security Community Legal Services

Economic Justice Australia is the peak organisation for community legal centres providing specialist advice to people on their social security issues and rights. You can search for member organisations (like Social Security Rights Victoria and Welfare Rights Centre) by location.

ejaustralia.org.au

Support with budgeting

MoneySmart

Reliable and easy to understand information from the Australian government. Provides information, tools, calculators on the following:

- Banking and budgeting
- Loans, credit and debt
- Investing and planning
- Super and retirement
- Insurance
- Scams and online safety
- Community resources

moneysmart.gov.au

Centrepay

A voluntary bill paying service which is free for Centrelink customers. You can use Centrepay to arrange regular deductions from your Centrelink payment.

servicesaustralia.gov.au/centrepay



Rent support

On this page, you will find a list of agencies that may be able to provide financial support with establishing a new private rental, including bond loans, rent in advance and rent in arrears for those eligible.

There are also advocacy support services available for current tenants who need information about their rights at any stage throughout their tenancy.

Tenants Advocacy

Each state and territory has a free service that provides information and support to renters about their rights.

VIC - tenantsvic.org.au

NSW - tenants.org.au

ACT - tenantsact.org.au

TAS - tutas.org.au

VIC: Private Rental Assistance Program

The Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP) is provided through local not-for-profit housing support agencies.

Search **'PRAP Providers'** in your internet search engine for your local agency.

ACT: Rent Relief

The Rent Relief Fund is administered by community support agency, Care.

02 6257 1788

carefcs.org

NSW: Housing Pathways

Assistance in setting up and maintaining private rental - includes some subsidies and interest free loans.

1800 422 322

facs.nsw.gov.au/housing

Tasmania: Housing Connect

The entry point for assistance for people experiencing homelessness or are in housing need, private rental assistance and information on housing options.

1800 800 588

homestasmania.com.au

Price comparison websites

Below are some government comparison services that provide reliable and impartial information.

Energy Made Easy

Government energy provider comparison site.

energymadeeasy.gov.au

Private Health Insurance comparison

Government private health insurance comparison site.

privatehealth.gov.au

Petrol Price Monitoring

There are now a number of private and free to access websites and apps now provide real time fuel price monitoring so users can find the cheapest price local to their location.

NSW & ACT Fuel Check

fuelcheck.nsw.gov.au

TAS Fuel Check

fuelcheck.tas.gov.au

VIC RACV

Not a government website but RACV would be considered a reliable source of information.

racv.com.au/on-the-road/driving-maintenance/fuel-prices

Utility help

Utility providers have financial hardship teams who can talk through payment options with you – this may include giving an extension or setting up a payment plan.

There are various concessions and grants available to provide bill relief (varied by state). These concessions include medical cooling concessions applicable to those living with MS, concessions for low-income households and households behind in their payments.

The Australian government has a website offering search options for energy rebates and concessions.

energy.gov.au

“Over the years, I lost a lot of work due to MS. You don’t know what’s coming or how to plan for it at all.”

- Chris, father of two living with MS



Fraud & Scams

It is important to remain vigilant to criminals looking to gain a financial advantage through various scam and fraud initiatives. Learning how to recognise scams can save a lot of money and heartache. It is just as important for those who have fallen victim to a scam to report it and to know what immediate steps to take to prevent ongoing exploitation.

ScamWatch

Australian government website providing information from how to recognise a scam to how to report one.

scamwatch.gov.au

Australian Cyber Security Centre

Another Australian government initiative that provides information on types of scams as well as education resources to know how to stay protected and to report a scam.

cyber.gov.au/report-and-recover/recover-from/scams



People living with a chronic illness such as MS need to be particularly mindful of scam attempts.

When symptoms such as fatigue are present, concentration and attention can be impaired and this can lead to missing red flags for scam attempts such as phishing (when scammers pretend to be from a reputable agency). Attempts to deceive people are becoming increasingly sophisticated and vigilance is needed.

Learning some key tips to protect yourself can protect not only your money but also your personal information from falling into the wrong hands



Complaints and consumer rights

It is important to understand what your rights are when dealing with businesses that provide goods or services. There is help available to help understand your rights and support you with complaints and disputes.

Australian Financial Complaints Authority

Provides consumers and small businesses with impartial and independent dispute resolution for complaints about financial products and services.

The service is offered as an alternative to tribunals and courts.

They can help people experiencing financial hardship to sort out disagreements with their bank, mortgage provider or other financial firms, including complaints if they deny financial hardship requests.

afca.org.au

Consumer Rights

Each state and territory has a consumer protection agency such as fair trading or consumer affairs.

Ombudsman services and community legal agencies provide information on rights and options where there is a dispute with a product or service provider.

The ACCC (Australian Competition and Consumer Commission) provides up-to-date listings of state and territory services.

- Local consumer protection agencies
- Industry ombudsmen and regulators
- Legal advice centres
- Small claims courts and tribunals

acc.gov.au



Contact MS Plus

Phone: 1800 042 138

Website and online chat: www.msplus.org.au

Email: connect@msplus.org.au