



Physiotherapy Business Case

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Ireland

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Physiotherapy Business Case



Executive Summary

MS Ireland is seeking funding from the 2024 National Service Plan for a programme to directly employ a Senior Physiotherapist in each HSE CHO area to enable 1,458 people to receive group physiotherapy programmes and to deliver 3,726 individual appointments per annum. The funding of this programme would provide much needed specialist services at a local level and address many of the issues associated with insufficient access to local primary care due to long waiting lists.

The programme will cost €880,000 per annum to run nationally. The cost will be €94,000 per CHO for a Senior Physiotherapist Salary including PRSI, pension, start up and running costs, and a contribution to a National Physiotherapy Manager and Administrator.

This programme will support the HSE in reducing the burden on primary care waiting lists, avoid A&E and OPD pinch points

and prevent disability and comorbidities. Furthermore the programme aligns with the objectives of the SláinteCare programme 'Right Care, Right Time, Right Place' with the addition of "Right Physiotherapist" to enhance outcomes.

Extensive research has shown the effectiveness of this service in reducing symptom severity, disability, falls and healthcare utilisation. This has also been shown to be the case in improving mental health, physical activity participation and enabling people to live well at home.

MS Ireland has consistently demonstrated the organisational capacity to run these programmes on budget, on time and exceeding output and outcomes targets and has the appropriate clinical and organisational governance systems in place. This specialist physiotherapy team will leverage the extensive experience, knowledge, systems and governance that are already in place and ready to expand.

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Benefits of this service

Our extensive evidence is that this specialist physiotherapy service would result in:



Improvements in symptoms and quality of life



Improvements in physical activity and general wellbeing



Reductions in healthcare utilisation

This evidence is generated from the research and audit of over **25 years of delivering physiotherapy programmes** for people with MS, our **extremely successful SláinteCare Integration Fund project** in 2020/21 that expanded our programmes to people with other neurological conditions, and our **specialist online programmes** developed during the pandemic.

Importantly our services benefit people living with other neurological conditions and not solely MS. For example, our Active Neuro programme (SláinteCare Integration Fund) includes people with Stroke and Parkinson's Disease.

Taking part in MS Ireland designed physiotherapy programmes has been shown to result in:

- A **reduction in usage of healthcare services** after our programmes by 43.1% (66/153 people). Of note, A&E and inpatient services utilisation reduced from 24 to 16 people (33% reduction) and from 122 to 51 bed days (57.4% reduction)
- A 30% **reduction in the number of falls** and a 49% reduction in the number of participants experiencing falls
- Long term **physical activity behaviour changes** via continued participation

in exercise and **increased confidence in their ability to self-manage** their condition

- Significant **improvements**, statistically and clinically, in **strength** (17.4%), **balance** (28.4% right leg, 15.3% left leg) and **walking endurance** (7%) measured objectively
- Significant **improvements**, statistically and clinically, in **quality of life** (20.2%), **fatigue** (16%) and **mental health** (20%)

Our programmes are highly valued by participants and data found:

- High attendance rates (76%), excellent satisfaction results (99%) and outstanding completion rates (92%) for online symptom management programmes
- **99% of participants finding the sessions useful** and 97% of respondents saying that the programmes have added benefits to a general exercise class.
- 92% of respondents reporting a preference of attending an online exercise class with people of a similar level and 68% preferring to attend online with people from all over Ireland rather than a local in person class.

Proposed service model

This service optimises both cross sectoral and integrated care principles, working with organisations such as Primary Care, Disability Services, Charities, Sports Partnerships and Universities with the person at the core of the service based on their need. The service we propose has many facets to ensure that we meet the needs of people with a wide range of abilities and presentations. The emphasis is on filling the “post rehabilitation void” and providing programmes that enable people to maintain gains in rehabilitation, prevent further disability and enable them to live well at home.

The unique aspects of this service are:

- A physiotherapy team with in-depth knowledge of neurological conditions and the experience of evidence for best practice in exercise and physical activity prescription.
- Value for money with high ratios of participants to therapists.
- Emphasis on education from a specialist therapist, as well as exercise, to optimise self-management and long-term behaviour change.
- Peer learning and social support from other participants in group programmes.
- Focus on health promoting physical activity and prevention of further disability.

- Delivery in the online environment ensuring that barriers to participation such as travel, time, childcare and fatigue are eliminated.
- Individual assessment online or in person and allocation to a group that best meets their needs and ensures tailored programmes.

Programmes include:

1. Health promoting physical activity programmes in a supportive environment either online or in person. Tailored exercise programmes for groups stratified by balance and walking ability, delivered by neurological physiotherapists who focus on improving or maintaining strength, fitness, flexibility and balance.
2. Symptom management programmes online or in person to provide specialist education and exercise to address symptoms that are barriers to participation in everyday life and physical activity such as fatigue, falls, dizziness and balance, continence, spasticity.
3. Individual assessment and treatment online or in person to address those symptoms, environmental or personal issues not possible in a group environment.



Risks and Cost Savings

At present MS Ireland's physiotherapy service is entirely reliant on fundraised income for all but the Western region (CHO-2) where we have a full time physiotherapist and in the Midwest region (CHO-3) where we have funding for 0.73 WTE physiotherapy service. The risk of not providing this funding is that we cease to deliver our current programmes due to dwindling fundraised income. People living with neurological conditions will continue to fall, have increased care needs due to increasing disability and will have poor physical and mental health and quality of life.

Cost savings arising from the implementation of this project include:

- **Preventing falls and associated hospital and care needs.** Preventing just four hip fractures, which can cost between €12,000 and €22,000 each depending on severity, would equate the cost of one Senior Physiotherapist salary.
- **Preventing disability and increased care.** The Cost of MS in Ireland study has found that delaying and reducing disability due to MS alone could reduce costs to the Irish health system annually by up to €19m.
- **Improving mental health, mobility and fatigue which are key symptoms associated with unemployment.** Evidence from our SláinteCare Integration Fund project found 87.6% of participants showed improved or maintained fatigue levels and 86.3% demonstrated improved or maintained balance and strength level.

Our data suggest that we can **halve the number of people falling, and the number of falls they have** through our programmes.

- People with MS, Stroke and Parkinsons (PD) fall at a similar rate to the over 85's (50% in a three month period). Injuries including hip fracture and A&E usage are high, as is increased cost of care associated with injury and activity curtailment due to fear of falling.

Our programmes maintain, and in some cases increase, strength, balance and walking ability therefore **maintaining independence and limiting progression of disability.**

- The costs of progressing disability in MS and PD is stark. The recent Societal Cost of MS in Ireland study suggests the estimated total cost associated with moderate MS (€66,567) was 75% higher than our estimated cost for those with mild MS (€28,007)

There is evidence to suggest that **exercise prevents relapses**, and the risk of relapse is 1.7 times higher in people with MS who are inactive.

- The cost of relapses in MS in Ireland was €22.7m in 2022 . Our programmes increase physical activity levels, and confidence in the ability to be active and can therefore additionally reduce the secondary health risks associated with inactivity and of relapse.

Evidence from our programmes is that we can statistically and clinically significantly **improve symptoms that contribute to the inability to work** resulting in further cost savings.

- Unemployment, absenteeism from work and presenteeism are all associated with living with neurological conditions such as MS, Stroke and PD and result in significant indirect costs to society.
- Symptoms of poor mobility, fatigue, depression and anxiety are factors associated with stopping or reducing work. Independent of employment status, the cost of depression in MS is estimated to be €590,000.

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Value for Money

Our audit and research data consistently finds that **statistically significant improvements in key outcomes are greater when programmes are led by our more specialised directly employed physiotherapists.** For example, MS Impact was improved by 6% in our general health promoting exercise regional programmes, and by **28% in our specialist, tailored online programmes.**

Our programmes have group interventions at their core meaning that more people benefit from the physiotherapists time. This is not to

achieve cost savings but rather because our experience and research evidence is that the education, peer learning and social support elements of these programmes are key ingredients.

In 2022 we had **2.25 WTE physiotherapists who treated 367 people, in 57 programmes with 5,431 hours of intervention received.** These intervention hours far exceed those provided in the primary care or rehabilitation environments where individual appointments are the norm.

Cost breakdown for one CHO:

Salary per CHO <i>(includes senior physiotherapist and contribution to manager and admin)</i>	€85,339
Running Cost <i>(Telehealth and Exercise Software, Records software, phone costs, equipment, travel, office)</i>	€6,913.56
Start up costs <i>(Laptops, Phone Handsets, Office Equipment Bundle)</i>	€1,750
Total per CHO	€94,000



“

I have felt connected to others who experience some of the same symptoms and situations I do as they have MS...it's one of the few times I felt I was in a safe, understanding space relating to my MS.

”



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In conclusion

We are asking that funding for a Senior Physiotherapist directly employed by MS Ireland be included in the 2024 National Service Plan for each HSE CHO area. The cost for this service is €94,000 per CHO or €880,000 across all nine CHO's.

Nine senior physiotherapists with a manager and administrator will provide a suite of programmes online, in person, group and individual, providing 1,458 participants treatment in group physiotherapy programmes and 3,726 individual appointments per annum.

Funding this innovative project will help reduce the burden on Primary Care physiotherapists, who have widely publicised lengthy waiting lists which ultimately negatively impact this cohort resulting in increased healthcare utilisation and associated costs. People with neurological conditions continue to be low on the primary care prioritisation systems, MS Ireland believes this specialist service will alleviate these issues at a local level throughout Ireland preventing secondary and tertiary healthcare usage.

Sarah's Story



The year before the very first lockdown, I had a serious flare-up of my MS that left my mobility extremely compromised.

I was very motivated to get back on my feet and had already seen the benefit of consistent effort. I had gone into hospital in a wheelchair and left it one month later using a frame. MS Ireland were there to help me to literally, get back on my feet.



The first physio sessions I attended on Zoom gave me the proper direction, professional guidance and motivation. Following that initial course, joining the yoga class and then adding a dedicated **Strength and Balance course helped get me off the frame and progressing to a walker.** I used the first lockdown to get walking again and, no doubt, am one of the few who can see that period of enforced isolation in a positive light!

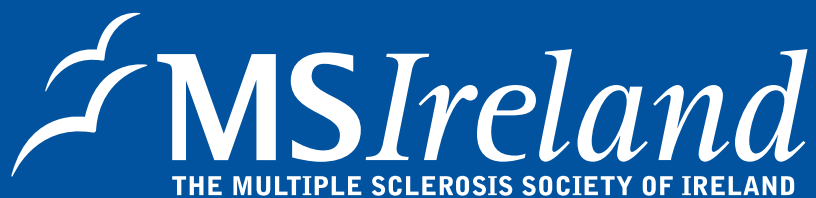
I have continued to improve physically with these sessions which has had a definite positive impact on my mental health as I'm definitely a results based person.

The last stand-alone physio session I attended was Vestibular Rehab (Balance and Dizziness) Although I thought I was fluent in MS symptoms, this course helped me identify and explain problems I had experienced for years even before my diagnosis. This alone was incredibly positive and affirming (in the 'I told you there was something' way!) but the exercises I learned on that course were literally life-changing.

Thanks to that course I was able to 'graduate' to a crutch and had enough self-confidence to go away for an overnight break. This has opened the world up to me again, not only in my walking ability but in preventing me from feeling overwhelmed in a shop or just looking down the street.

I can honestly say that the MS Ireland physio sessions have had nothing but a positive impact on my physical and mental health.

Thank you for all the seen and unseen work you do.



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