



# Style Guide

## Use of language and images in public communications

### Overview

The power of words and images influences community perceptions and attitudes of people with multiple sclerosis (MS). These perceptions and attitudes have a significant impact on people living with MS. As such, it is an important responsibility and a huge challenge to those who develop public communications.

This document aims to provide a basic guide on appropriate language and image use and positioning of people with MS (pwms) for third party agencies who work with MS Australia.

Much of the content of this guide is derived from “Words Matter,” produced by the Physical Disability Council of NSW Inc<sup>1</sup>.

### Language

Appropriate language should:

1. Bring about a shift in social emphasis.

Eg: Using **person with MS/person with disability** rather than *MS sufferer/disabled person* moves the focus from the disability to the person.

2. Position a person living with a disability in an active rather than passive role.  
Eg: **Wheelchair user** contributes to the concept of an active, independent person rather than ‘*wheelchair bound*’ which is passive.

3. Put the person first  
Eg: has MS or living with MS

### Myths and Facts

It is important not to focus on stereotypes, through the use of language or images. Stereotypes discriminate because they oversimplify qualities.







Myth	Fact
Disability (of which MS is one) is a tragedy.	Disability (MS) is part of everyday life. People with MS are everywhere in society.
People with MS who are married and have children are extraordinary.	People with MS who are married and have children <b>are like any other people that are married with children.</b>
People with MS lead boring, uneventful lives.	People with MS <b>lead lives, like anyone else.</b>
Families, particularly spouses of people with MS, are exceptionally heroic for living with a fate worse than death.	Families, particularly spouses of people with MS, <b>are living with a loved one like anyone else.</b>
People with MS, however progressive, are asexual.	People with MS, however progressive, <b>are sexual beings like anyone else.</b>
People with MS who excel are super	People with MS who excel <b>are like any</b>

heroes.	<b>other person who excels.</b>
People with MS succeed <i>in spite</i> of their MS.	People with MS succeed, sometimes, because of their disability.

### Correct terms

The terms we use will have a more positive and lasting impact when people with MS are approached as part of the target audience, not outside of it. We know that there are over 16,000 people with MS in Australia, with many of those affected forming a substantial part of our target audience.

Below is a list of terms and more inclusive alternatives.

MS sufferer, victim of MS	X	People/Person with MS	
Wheelchair-bound Confined to a wheelchair In a wheelchair	X	Wheelchair user	
Non-disabled	X	Person without disability Able-bodied	
A special needs individual	X	A person with a disability	
Victim	X	No replacement. People with MS and other disabilities are not victims and must not be portrayed as such.	
Blind/visually impaired	X	Person with vision impairment.	

### Use of images

Images always send a message. When a person with MS is photographed or an image represents a person with MS, more often than not, the focus falls on their disability or their equipment (eg wheelchair). This kind of image use may inadvertently devalue the person by using inappropriate perspectives or settings.

### Checklist for appropriate image usage

Image is not offensive to pwms, ie, does not position them as victims, lead them to believe there is no hope, etc	
It is unlikely the image will have negative side-effects. Eg: Portrayal of the body 'turning on itself' is not attractive to employers of pwms.	
Image represents MS appropriately.	
Image is in-line with MS Australia values.	

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