



AUSTRALIA

**Media Release
Strictly Embargoed
00:00hrs Friday 16 October 2009**

Note to editors: The Hon John Robertson will launch the rebate at 11.30am today. See full details below.

**MS AUSTRALIA AND PARKINSON'S NSW
WELCOMES NSW GOVT MEDICAL ENERGY REBATE –
COOL RELIEF FOR 10,000 AUSTRALIANS WITH TEMPERATURE INTOLERANCE**

A NSW Medical Energy Rebate to assist low-income people living with the debilitating effects of temperature intolerance has been welcomed by MS Australia and Parkinson's NSW. The Medical Energy Rebate will be launched today by The Hon John Robertson, Minister for Energy and will see a rebate of \$130 per annum provided to those people who suffer from the condition.

Temperature intolerance, also known as thermoregulatory dysfunction, is a significant medical issue for people with conditions such as multiple sclerosis (MS), Parkinson's disease, post-polio syndrome and spinal cord injury. For people with MS even a small increase in body temperature can lead to extreme fatigue, and an increase in other MS symptoms such as blindness, incontinence, and tremors. For people with Parkinson's disease colder temperatures, in particular, can exacerbate the physical and physiological symptoms related to the disease including a further reduction in mobility and cognitive function.

Dr Michael Summers, Senior Policy Advisor for MS Australia and co-author of *The Keeping Cool Survey* says "The NSW Government's new rebate will provide much needed assistance for people living with MS on low incomes who have to run their air conditioners approximately 15 times more than average NSW households.

"We know that 90% of people living with MS find their symptoms increase dramatically when they get too hot, and with rapidly rising electricity prices the cost of keeping cool at home has become a real problem for those on low incomes. This new rebate will make a very real difference in the lives of many people with living with MS in NSW."

Miriam Dixon, CEO of Parkinson's NSW says that thermoregulatory dysfunction is an often unknown symptom of Parkinson's disease (and many other conditions) with a very real effect physically, physiologically and financially on people living with the disease. There are over 30,000 people affected by Parkinson's disease in NSW alone. "The symptoms of Parkinson's disease seem to get worse during high and, more commonly, low temperatures. Mobility can be further restricted and muscles can stiffen and the temperature can also alter people's cognitive function and mood. On

top of that, at the end of a season, they face a huge electricity bill because of all the extra heating or cooling used," she said.

"We think the rebate is a great step in the right direction and would like to thank the NSW Government for recognising the ongoing financial impact that living with a disease such as Parkinson's has on so many Australians."

The Medical Energy Rebate will be in place for five years and will take effect on 1 January 2010. People who suffer from temperature intolerance can apply for the rebate through their energy retailer from December 2009 by submitting an application form along with a letter from a health professional confirming they suffer from the condition. Once approved the \$130 rebate will be automatically deducted from their energy bill.

For further information visit: http://www.dwe.nsw.gov.au/energy/info_payment_rebates.shtml

Case Studies

Jill Hodder

Jill Hodder, 55 of Concord has been living with heat intolerance since her diagnosis of multiple sclerosis in 1997 and says that the effects of the condition are extremely difficult to live with. "Every year I dread the warmer months because when it gets hot my body just shuts down" Jill said.

"In summer I am forced to limit all activity to the early morning and late night when the temperatures are cooler. It's a shame because the warmer months are usually the busier months with Christmas festivities.

"Along with the emotional toll of not being able to enjoy these times properly comes the financial strain of having to pay electricity bills just so my body can keep running.

"For most Australians it's a luxury to run the air conditioning during summer but for me it's a necessity," she said.

Ross Jones

Since being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease four years ago Ross Jones, 60 of Baulkham Hills, struggles to regulate his body temperature during winter. Ross has had to purchase new heating devices and even had a reverse cycle heating system installed in his home to help combat the problem. Resultantly, his household electricity bills have soared.

Ross said, "Last winter was hell for me. I was freezing and had trouble especially in the mornings with my mobility. Winter lasts a long time for me these days. And to make matters worse my electricity bill is always growing."

"I used to rug up in a scarf and beanie to go to all the Tigers games. I really loved the atmosphere and excitement of going to the footy. It's something that I just can't do any more and I really miss it," he said.

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Note to Editors:

Medical Energy Rebate Launch

The Hon John Robertson will announce the Medical Energy Rebate today

Date: Friday 16 October 2009

Time: 11.30am

Address: The launch will be held at the home of Jill Hodder. For privacy reasons please contact Kate McEvoy for address details on 0424 649 148.

MS Media Enquiries

Dr Michael Summers and Jill Hodder are both available for interview

Contact: Kate McEvoy 0424 649 148 / kate@katemcevoy.com.au

Parkinson's NSW Media Enquiries

Miriam Dixon and Ross Jones are both available for interview

Contact: Tessa Anderssen/ tessa@polkadotpr.com.au / 0411 708 587 / 9281 4190