



## MEDIA RELEASE

### CAMPAIGN TO KEEP PEOPLE WITH MS IN EMPLOYMENT TAKEN TO CANBERRA

30 May 2011

**Federal Member for Chisholm, Anna Burke MP has thrown her support behind MS Australia's campaign to keep people with multiple sclerosis (MS) in employment during MS Awareness Week.**

Ms Burke has moved a Private Members' Motion in the Federal Parliament to raise awareness of the push by MS Australia to ensure support in employment for people with multiple sclerosis.

Australian research shows that people with the disease have less chance of being in paid employment than those with other chronic illnesses. More than 80% of people living with the disease lose their job within ten years of diagnosis, despite the fact that most people are diagnosed in their 20s and 30s.

The research also showed that 58% of their carers are forced to also change their work hours due to the impact of the disease.

ACT/NSW/VIC Acting CEO of MS Australia Ken Sharpe said employers should be doing more to include people with chronic illnesses like MS in their workplaces.

"The best employers are always the ones that recognise that health issues or caring responsibilities may impact on any of their staff, and that workplace flexibility can help to get the best out of their workforce," Mr Sharpe said.

"For people living with MS, that might mean employers tailoring work practices for individuals focusing on their skills rather than deficits."

Mr Sharpe said current stress on the national labour market and the general ageing of the workforce means that employers need to turn their minds to being inclusive of workers with MS and other chronic diseases.

"With an ageing population, our labour market is under increasing pressure. Rather than concentrating on looking at the recruitment of skilled migrants, we should be

examining better skills and training systems – and people with disabilities should be right at the top of the queue to receive that training.”

Ms Burke noted the benefits of employment for people with multiple sclerosis.

“Staying at work provides MS sufferers with numerous benefits. By staying in work, MS sufferers have the opportunity, despite their condition, to contribute meaningfully to a workplace. This builds self-confidence as well as vocational skills and experience, and provides a significant avenue for human interaction”, Ms Burke said.

“The recent measures in the Federal Budget to boost employment of people with disabilities will assist people with MS. New rules allowing people on the Disability Support Pension to work up to 30 hours per week for 2 years without affecting their eligibility for this pension is a significant incentive and an important support for people with MS who are determined to stay in the workforce.

“In addition, the provision of higher wage subsidies to reward employers who hire people with a disability for at least 15 hours a week will make people with MS more attractive to potential employers”, Ms Burke said.

MS Awareness Week will be used by MS Australia to call for:

- Amendments to the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) to include the right of all people with disabilities or chronic illnesses and their carers to request flexible working arrangements – a right which is currently only available to carers of children with a disability under 18;
- Development of a workplace flexibility advisory service for employers run by employer peak bodies and
- The creation of business and industry-based sick leave pools to provide greater flexibility for people who need paid leave over and above their entitlement.

**For more information go to:**

[www.msaustralia.org.au](http://www.msaustralia.org.au)

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