

Becoming more inclusive



by Cyndi Zagieboylo



**Cyndi Zagieboylo, President
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Spring is a time for growth. The National MS Society is continually striving to grow to ensure we connect with all people affected by multiple sclerosis, so that they can get what they need to live their best lives. Growth also involves learning, self-examination and gaining feedback.

As you'll read in "[A fresh perspective](#)," researchers used to believe that African-Americans were not as susceptible to MS as people of European descent. While our knowledge is still evolving, we've learned enough to challenge that premise. African-Americans do get MS, and it is more prevalent than previously thought.

Using our expanded understanding, along with information about the demographics of people who engage with and join the Society, it is clear that African-Americans are underrepresented throughout our organization.

The Society is an organization for everyone who wants to be part of the MS movement. We embrace diversity as a core part of our culture. The knowledge that there is a gap in participation is an indicator that we need to be more welcoming and inclusive. For that reason, we have been taking an inventory of our intercultural beliefs—to see how open we are as an organization to various cultures, and to understand what biases we bring to the table. We're facing these issues openly and striving to grow and expand—to be better.

At the most basic level, we're making sure that African-Americans are represented in **Momentum**, on our web pages, and in the brochures and materials we produce. We've also developed a series of focused educational conferences on MS for African-Americans, and we have an African-American advisory committee that provides guidance to the Society's leadership team.

We also have a Hispanic advisory committee that has helped us understand how we can be more inclusive. Spanish-speaking MS Navigators are available so that when someone calls 1-800-344-4867, they can communicate in the language of their preference. The committee also prioritizes having printed materials in Spanish with images that reflect Hispanic culture.

We want to make sure that everyone who lives with MS is connected with the resources, information and people that can enable them to live their best lives. We need your help with our outreach. For example, we need more self-help group leaders who are part of diverse communities. We're looking for volunteers who will focus on community outreach. We want to engage with anyone who can help us understand the unique needs of different communities so we can take further steps to ensure that, regardless of culture, ethnicity or any differences among us, our common passion to achieve a world free of MS unites us. Together, we are stronger.

Drop me a line. Let me know your thoughts.

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Let me know your thoughts. Email me at cyndi@nmss.org.