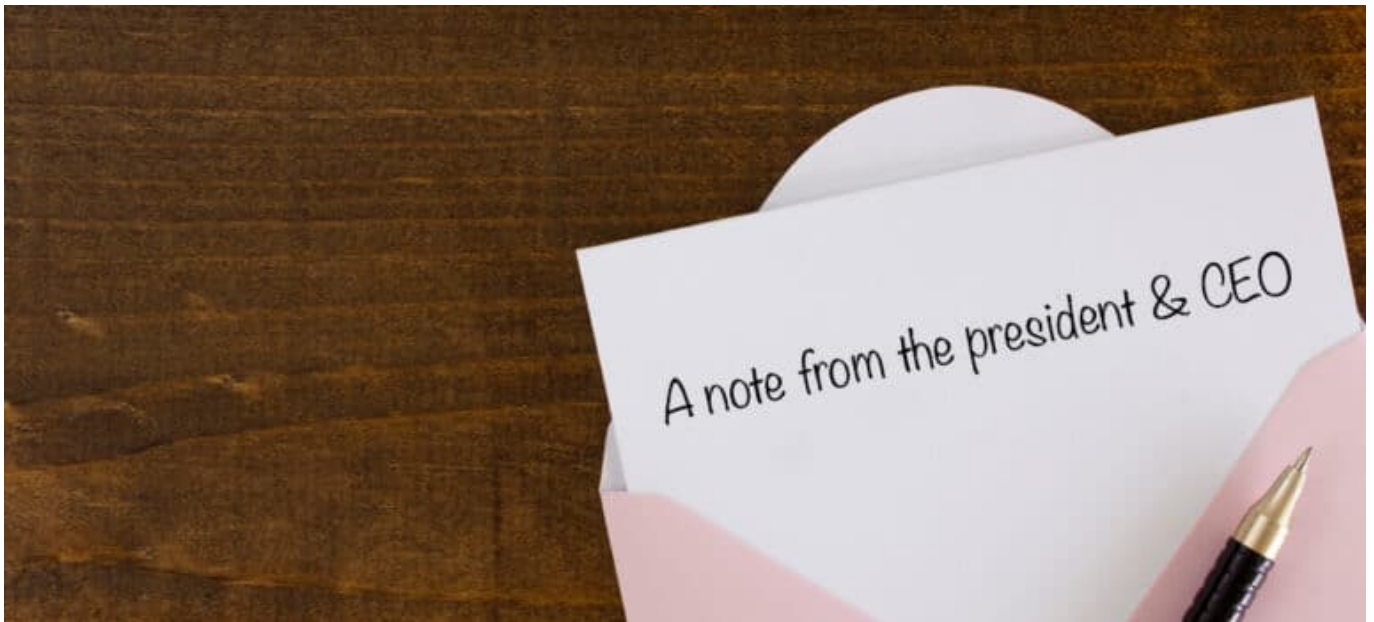


A message from Cyndi Zagieboylo: Reconnecting with our community



**Cyndi Zagieboylo,
President & CEO**

The past few years living with COVID-19 have been challenging in many ways for everybody, including the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. Early in the pandemic, our priority was to maintain and expand our connections with people while we were all isolating at home. No one should live with MS alone — we are here to make sure no one has to.

We had to learn how to shift from gathering in person to meeting virtually. Technology for virtual gatherings has improved over time, and we keep working on making the best use of

the tools available. Meeting virtually helped us keep the MS movement together, moving forward and even growing!

For example, since March 2020, we have held three virtual Black MS Experience Summits. Importantly, 20% of the approximately 800 participants each year were new to the Society. Those virtual meetings gave us the chance to reach new people — and to grow the MS movement.

That's some good news. More challenging, the pandemic forced us to cancel in-person Walk MS events across the country. According to Kristin Gibbs, vice president, Walk MS, before the pandemic, we had 500 in-person Walk MS events with registration of 230,000, raising \$40 million in revenue. Walk MS was then, and continues to be, the largest gathering of people affected by MS in the world — at Walk MS, we rally around our mission and each other.

It was a blow to have to cancel the in-person walks, but rather than shut down, we shifted to virtual events. In 2021, we adopted a 100% virtual campaign, with registration of 40,000 people, and we raised \$20 million revenue.

We encouraged participants to “celebrate your way,” whether that meant putting in the miles on a treadmill, walking a route inside your home or meandering through your neighborhood. We launched Walk MS on Demand, where participants could make an online “I Walk For” bib, visit sponsorship booths, watch videos, learn about the Society and see some of the familiar components of in-person events.

Kristin points out that although we had fewer participants in 2021, those who did sign up had some of the strongest individual fundraising results with higher averages than previous years. “They clearly were committed to the Society and the achievement of our mission,” Kristin says.

Fortunately, 2022 marked a return to in-person events. Now, we need to figure out a balance — making the most of virtual connections while also ensuring opportunities for the in-person experiences that many of us crave. One step we took was to launch an enhanced virtual experience called “Walk MS: Your Way.” People are encouraged to participate however and whenever they wish.

“With the successful return to in-person events and the launch of Walk MS: Your Way, Walk MS is well positioned for ongoing success. We strive to meet people where they are and provide the celebration they value, whether that's at an in-person Walk MS event with 2,000 people or in the comfort of their own backyard with a few family and friends,” Kristin says.

We now offer more ways for people to engage than ever before. Not just in-person. Not just virtual. Not just in large groups. But all the ways we can come together. We are growing the MS movement to accelerate progress and to make sure that everyone knows that they do not need to face MS alone. We are here!

How do you like to connect and engage? I'd love to hear from you.

Cyndi Zagieboylo
President & CEO
National MS Society

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