

Taking the first step



**Cyndi Zagieboylo,
President & CEO**

For many people with multiple sclerosis, Walk MS is

their first introduction to a vast community of support.

by Cyndi Zagieboylo

This spring, more than 330,000 people will participate in Walk MS at one of 560 locations around the country. For some, it is an annual tradition. And like the individuals whose stories you'll read in "[Creating community](#)," many people use the event to rally and demonstrate their love for someone with multiple sclerosis, and to raise funds for a very personal cause.

A woman I met recently told me that Walk MS has turned into her annual family reunion. The family comes together from around the country, participates in the Walk and then heads to her house for a big cookout. When someone builds that kind of experience around it, Walk MS becomes even more meaningful.

But for many, many people, Walk MS will be their first introduction to the National MS Society. And let's face it: For those who are newly diagnosed, that can feel intimidating.

Many people, though, have told me that Walk MS is like something they can slip on and see how it fits—in other words, learn how much they want to connect with other people who have MS. They can go with a family member or friend who understands them. They might meet somebody else with whom they connect, or they might not. But it's low risk. It can be a great first step.

One woman I know wanted to participate after her daughter was diagnosed with MS. However, her daughter wasn't sure if she was ready to attend—if she wanted to see or be around so many other people with MS. Her mother talked her into it but all morning was concerned about her daughter. When they finally had a chance to check in with each other, her daughter was beaming. She said, "Mom, everyone here loves me." That's the feeling we are going for with our Walk events! The daughter learned that Walk MS provides a community of support, and that no one needs to be alone with this disease.

That feeling is so empowering! But there's another critical aspect of Walk MS: the fundraising. Last year, through Walk MS, we raised \$48 million that will move forward our strategic priorities, such as connecting people affected by MS to information, resources and others to ensure they have what they need to live their best lives; leading global collaborative MS research; and amplifying the voices of the MS movement to drive needed policy change.

Family members often tell me that even though they can't be directly involved in research or specialized medical care, Walk MS helps them participate in the solution. They say, "This is one thing I can do. I can help raise money to fuel the mission to end the disease and, in doing so, demonstrate my love for someone very important to me."

At first, you may feel awkward asking others for money. But what you may discover is that

people want to give to someone or something that's important to them. You are likely to learn of new connections—people whom you didn't know were affected by MS.

The mother I mentioned earlier realized how much easier it was to raise money than she thought it would be. She eventually became the chair of the Walk MS committee in her area because she wanted to make sure that others—especially those newly diagnosed—could have the potentially life-changing opportunities to connect with others, and to support the Society's mission.

I'd love to hear about your experiences with Walk MS, and how we can help you make it even more powerful!

Cyndi Zagieboylo
President & CEO
National MS Society

To learn more or register for Walk MS, visit [WalkMS.org](https://www.walkms.org).