An Assessment of Fundamental Rights of People Living with ALS/MND Worldwide: Genetics

Jessica Mabe¹, Catherine Cummings¹

¹International Alliance of ALS/MND Associations

BACKGROUND

A guiding document for the International Alliance of ALS/MND Associations is the Fundamental Rights of People Living with ALS/MND (PALS) that states the aspirational rights of the global community. Originally conceived in the late 1990s as the “Baseline of Services for People Living with ALS/MND,” these rights represent the ideal for individuals living with ALS/MND and caregivers worldwide. They are updated each year by the Alliance’s PALS and Caregivers of People Living with ALS/MND (CALS) Advisory Council.

Although the Alliance and its representatives understand that some of these conditions might not be immediately attainable, this document represents the set of rights all Alliance member organizations should adopt and promote as conditions, systems, and resources allow.

In April 2021, the Alliance created a survey to ascertain the level of agreement that these rights were being respected for PALS and CALS. In May 2023, the second survey of its kind was launched to benchmark against the data captured in its first version.

METHODS

The survey was done by Bramm Research, an independent third party, and it was launched both through our member organizations and on social media in May 2023. It was in the field for 60 days. We received responses from 54 countries. The survey was available in 16 different languages.

HYPOTHESIS

*Access remains the biggest issue for genetic testing and counselling, and it remains unbalanced between the Global North and Global South.

RESULTS

Genetics are a key part of understanding ALS/MND. This topic relates to fundamental right #11, the right to have access, upon diagnosis, to: up-to-date education about clinical genetics in ALS/MND, genetic counselling, genetic testing, safeguards against genetic discrimination, and subject to education and counselling, blood relatives should also be given the same access, where relevant.

DISCUSSION

Genetic testing and counselling can provide PALS with important information to support their journey. Acknowledging the genetic makeup of ALS/MND can help with treatment options and understanding the risk of passing it on to family members. Some interesting points from our 2023 survey are:

* Genetic counsellors are perceived to be the most highly specialized professional in ALS/MND at 80% (followed by neurologists at 72% and respiratory therapists at 70%). Access to a genetic counselor (as well as professionals specialized in ALS/MND) is one of the drivers for respondents who strongly agreed with having access to high quality care (fundamental right #1).
* Access to genetic testing and counselling remains lower in the Global South as compared to the Global North.
* Access to genetic testing, counselling, and genetic discrimination safeguards has remained the same since 2021, though in 2023 the results are higher with regards to having access to an ALS/MND association provides better alignment with this right.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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For more information on this project and others please contact us at alliance@als-mnd.org or visit us at als-mnd.org.