

75 years of progress

In 1952, NALC embraced the Muscular Dystrophy Association as its “official charity,” becoming the first national sponsor since the MDA founded in 1950. The union’s first nationally coordinated campaign to raise funds for MDA came during Thanksgiving week in 1953, when tens of thousands of letter carriers in more than 800 cities returned to their routes for a second time. The all-volunteer effort was called “The Letter Carrier March for Muscular Dystrophy.”

Individual letter carriers repeated their appointed rounds, soliciting donations door to door. And, because of the late hour the volunteers got the nickname “the porch light brigade.” Many carried their empty leather mail satchels as badges of authenticity to reassure donors these men and women could be trusted with their hard-earned nickels, dimes and quarters.

In the decades since, NALC members have used various techniques to raise money for MDA, from raffles, pancake suppers and golf tournaments to canister collections at roadblocks and backyard carnivals with dunk tanks. Thanks to the efforts of thousands of letter carriers combined with the contributions of millions of other caring citizens across this country, MDA research has realized dramatic research breakthroughs in recent years. These medical breakthroughs are solid evidence that letter carriers’ persistent efforts to help alleviate the suffering inflicted by this terrible disease have made a difference.

Now 73 years later, NALC continues making contributions that are instrumental in muscular dystrophy research. NALC members carry on the tradition of the porch light brigade—delivering hope to people with neuromuscular diseases.

Below you can read, in the association’s own words, about the 75 years of progress made by MDA, which you have been a big part of. NALC is proud of you and everything you have done to make this possible.

Progress in research

When MDA was founded in 1950, there was just one doctor in the country studying muscle disease. Today, MDA’s research program funds thousands of scientists and clinicians making breakthroughs worldwide. Right now, there are many clinical trials underway exploring drug therapies that could stop or even reverse some of the impact on muscle mass caused by neuromuscular conditions.

In the 1950s, there were no FDA-approved treatments for neuromuscular diseases. Treatment options were primarily supportive, focusing on symptom management without addressing disease progression. Now the landscape has been transformed through gene discovery and with the development of targeted therapies that address the root causes of

diseases, providing new avenues for disease management. Also, in just the past decade, the FDA has approved 20-plus new treatments for children and adults living with muscle disorders. That kind of progress was absolutely unthinkable in the past.

Empowering people with knowledge and resources

In the 1950s, individuals living with neuromuscular diseases had no clear guidance and little access to information about their condition or how to manage it. Today, families can access a wealth of resources—from disease-specific guides to expert-led webinars—helping them navigate their journey with clarity and confidence.

When MDA was founded, families affected by neuromuscular diseases often had limited access to specialized care. Today, the nationwide network of MDA Care Centers serve as a critical resource for tens of thousands of families each year. The network plays a vital role in advancing clinical research, participating in hundreds of clinical trials for groundbreaking treatments and therapies. What began as a small initiative to connect families to specialized care has grown into the largest care network for neuromuscular diseases in the United States.

MDA’s advocacy efforts have long driven meaningful change for people living with neuromuscular diseases. Legislative victories, like the expansion of newborn screening, have ensured earlier diagnoses and access to treatments during critical stages of life, offering families more hope and possibilities. MDA has also been instrumental in advocating for improved air travel accessibility, breaking down barriers and ensuring safer, more inclusive transportation for individuals with mobility challenges. These victories reflect how progress in public policy can create meaningful change.

In 1950, families living with neuromuscular diseases often faced their challenges in isolation. Today, MDA’s community engagement programs bring people together, promoting a sense of connection and belonging with programs like Summer Camp, initiatives that create shared experiences for families, to opportunities for learning, growth and mutual support.

Looking to the future

MDA remains focused on what’s next: accelerating research, expanding access to care, and creating a future filled with hope and progress for all families living with neuromuscular diseases. New therapies, expanded access to care, and groundbreaking innovations will reshape what’s possible. Together, we can build the momentum to turn these exciting changes into reality. With your help, the next 75 years can bring even more discoveries, better access to care, and a stronger, more connected community.