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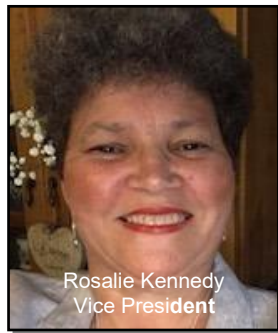
Professor Emeritus Sir Gustav Nossal AC CBE FAA FRS

2024 - 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Polio NSW 2024 / 2025 Board



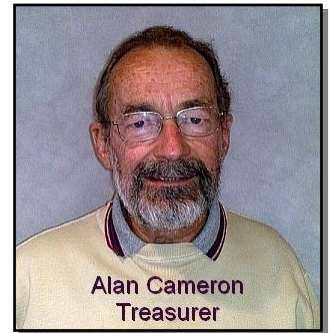
Gillian Thomas
President



Rosalie Kennedy
Vice President



Merle Thompson
Secretary



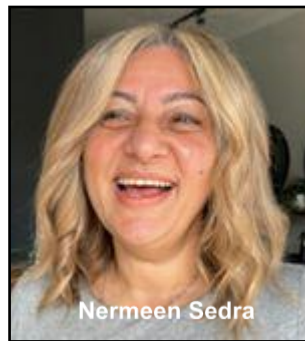
Alan Cameron
Treasurer



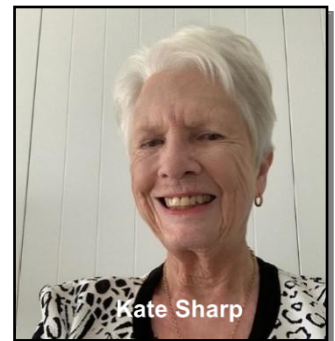
Ella Gaffney
Support Group Coordinator



Bill McKee



Nermeen Sedra



Kate Sharp

Polio NSW Office



Fatma Alameddine
Admin Officer

Shylie Little
Volunteer



President's Report

Gillian Thomas OAM

At the 2024 Annual General Meeting we were very sad to lose Vice President Gail Hassell who stood down after 4 years sterling service. Gail joined the Board in January 2021 and took on the role of planning, arranging and running online webinars. With Sue Ellis leaving the Board at the 2023 AGM, Gail was elected as Vice President, while still maintaining her original duties, as well as convening our Port Macquarie Support Group. We wish Gail all the best as she enjoys a well-deserved retirement, although we doubt she has totally slowed down!

After 36 years operating as a peer-support network for polio survivors and their families, we still welcome new members every year as people connect with us for the first time. Without the resources to enable wide-ranging advertising to reach polio survivors and encourage them to join, we are grateful for Polio Australia's outreach programs, including the Australian Polio Register and NSW and ACT Community Information Sessions, which refer new contacts on to our team.

As a predominantly ageing polio community, we sadly lose members each year as well. During 2024-2025 we were advised of the following deaths: Norma Ashelford (Cherrybrook), Frank Chesworth (Hurlstone Park), Frank Dowdle (Nana Glen), Ron Glinn (The Ponds), Bill Hayward (Worworing Heights), Jean Martin (Haberfield), George Quinell (Morts Estate), Gordon Robertson (Bonnells Bay) and Ron Thornhill (Dunoon). Each year, an increasing number of members also decline to renew their memberships due to advanced age and ill health. Having said this, we still have members who joined at the very beginning, and we are very grateful to them and all renewing members for their ongoing support for our work.

Looking forward to the new year, with our finances now on a more secure footing the Board determined that we are once again in a position to employ a part-time office administrator. The extra staffing will allow more regular contact with members, faster response times, and take some admin tasks off the Board. Importantly, the plea I made in last year's report for assistance with *Network News*, webinars, and website and social media updates will now also be able to be fulfilled.

In closing, I would like to express my thanks to the Board, particularly the Executive, who have once again shouldered the load over the last year. We give our grateful thanks to all Support Group Convenors who provide vital connection and support to often otherwise isolated members. We also express our gratitude to the Northcott Society which generously provides our Office accommodation and assists with printing costs.

Polio NSW Office

Fatma Alameddine is our part-time Admin Officer in our Parramatta office.

I work on Wednesdays between 10:00 am and 3:30 pm.

The bulk of my time is spent processing membership renewal forms and donations as they come in from members and then processing each payment through MYOB and actioning emails. Donation thank you letters are also processed and either mailed or emailed out with a receipt attached.

In addition, I have also been working on updating various databases including, membership database, email databases, new members database as well as sending out information kits and new member kits when necessary and filing paperwork.

Over the year I am involved in organising and partaking in mailouts where I get a crew of volunteers to help me send out quarterly Network News newsletters, renewal forms, and the big mail out towards the end of the year where we send out paperwork to members for the AGM. I also answer phone enquiries as they come in as well as messages that are left on the phone.

Shylie Little, Polio Australia's Finance Officer, generously volunteers some time to Polio NSW. Shylie assists Fatma by collecting mail from our PO Box and doing any banking, as well as helping her with any tricky MYOB questions. In addition, Shylie manages our payroll activities and produces monthly financial reports for the Board.

Network News

Merle Thompson OAM, Secretary

Sue Ellis resigned as Newsletter Editor at the end of 2024. Sue had done an amazing job in this role for many years, and we thank her sincerely for this. In earlier years Nola Buck was also involved in compiling the Newsletter.

Sue's last issue was No. 121. As no one offered to take on this position, Board members had to add this to their existing responsibilities. Consequently, only one issue was produced during the remainder of the financial year.

Issue 121

In this issue Gail Hassall provided a report on the webinar "*Demystifying Dementia*" which had been presented in September by Donna Ward from Group Homes Australia. Donna explained the various types of dementia, their symptoms and risk factors and how to reduce risk factors. Communication and connection with others together with meeting our human needs were important topics.

Other articles also related to brain function. Psychologist Hal Goldberg article was titled "*How Polio and PPS Impact our Character, Personality and Emotional Experiences*". There were also articles by Dr Bruno about brain fog and Millie Malone's article, "*Is This PTSD?*" (post traumatic syndrome disorder). A second article by Millie "*The Last Straw*" related to striving to achieve.

This issue included a Bruno Bytes item on "new" muscle weakness, Tremors/Shaking, Statins (cholesterol medication) and Vitamins.

Therapist and Counsellor, William Montgomery discussed how to approach family who are non-vaccers in his article, "*My Grandchildren May Not be Vaccinated*".

Two important topics for polio survivors were covered in an article by Dr Marney on fatigue "*Fatigue – WHY am I so tired?*" and Dr DeMayo's article "*Exercise and Weight Loss for the Polio Survivor*" answers all our questions on how to balance these two issues.

Issue 122

This issue started with a sporting theme. The first article was entitled "*My Paralympic Journey*" by Lyn Lillecrapp OAM and was a report on her talk in the seminar following the Annual General Meeting. The second article was entitled "*Max Baldwin OAM: From polio and dragging a canoe mid-race in the dark of night to the '56 Olympic Team*" and told the story of Max's Olympic participation. It was provided by Max, aged 97, and sent by his son Matt.

A special feature was a tribute to Dr Richard Bruno who died in October 2024. Dr Bruno's snippets and articles have been included in many issues of *Network News*.

The remaining articles were more medically oriented and included one providing the basic facts about post-polio and was based on the writings of Dr Bruno. Also included was an article on back and shoulder pain in post-polio and short articles drawn from overseas websites with topics including chronic pain, shaking and the use of gabapentin from restless legs.

Board Attendance Record

Board 2024-2025	Possible Meetings	Meetings Attended	Comments
Gillian Thomas	7	7	
Merle Thompson	7	7	
Alan Cameron	7	5	
Ella Gaffney	7	6	
Gail Hassall	1	1	Did not re-stand at 2024 AGM
Geraldine James	1	0	Did not re-stand at 2024 AGM
Rosalie Kennedy	7	7	
Bill McKee	7	5	
Nermeen Sedra	6	6	
Esther Smart	1	0	Did not re-stand at 2024 AGM
Kate Sharp	5	4	Appointed to Board in Feb 2025

Support Groups

Ella Gaffney, Support Group Coordinator

This year's annual support group report, my tenth, is very short due to the closure of more groups, resulting from ageing, and health.

There are only a few support groups that are active now.

If you or anyone you know would be interested in joining one of the active groups, or in starting a support group in your area, please get in contact with me or the Polio NSW office.

Ella – mobile: 0407 407 564, email: legaff@bigpond.com

Polio NSW – phone: 02 9890 0646, email: office@polionsw.org.au

ALBURY/WODONGA

Convenor: Margaret Bennie

This year the group decided they would like to meet more often, so we have met every 2nd Sunday of every 2nd month at the Commercial Club where we have lunch and talk. Although we all have different problems, sharing information is very informative. It has been working well, and we usually get between 8 to 12 people all the time. We have lost so many members in the past few years either from inability to get out or from passing away so I can see a time when the numbers will drop dramatically. But I must say we are all ageing gracefully.

We would like to thank Polio NSW and Polio Australia for their updates and articles they give us.

CENTRAL COAST

Convenor: Wayne Woolley

Polio Support Group is still going strong with an enthusiastic membership of 8. We have had a new member join us. The change from a meeting room to a great lunch venue has been a success with almost full attendance each month. Good lunch options and convenient parking helps.

Polio topics are always on the agenda, but so are many others.

We meet on the 1st Thursday of the month (except for January) at the Kincumber Hotel dining room, at noon.

HILLS DISTRICT

Convenor: Susan Ellis

Our meeting is held on the 2nd Wednesday of every month at West Pennant Hills Sports Club, from 10:30 am to noon. After our meeting we enjoy lunch in the club's restaurant. Attendance on average is 5. The format of our meetings is informal but allows each individual to speak in turn allowing for full group participation and discussion.

This year we were presented with a number of health issues that have affected our attendance – falls causing major fractures with surgery and lengthy rehabilitation, knee replacements, pacemakers, and a dementia diagnosis. And, of course, as polio survivors are determined to return to the 'norm' as soon as possible, they returned to our meetings. We continue to have 5-6 at each meeting.

It is always a productive time spent together while sharing life experiences and challenges and swapping helpful advice with laughter, friendship and support.

Due to various health issues, a treat for our group was to organise a delayed Christmas Lunch in January 2025 at a special Italian restaurant that we have enjoyed now for a number of years. Partners were also included, bringing our numbers up to 10 for lunch.

In the New Year we were able to welcome back two members who had had an extensive recovery after major surgery and rehabilitation. It was a joy to see them return to the fold.

NORTHERN RIVERS

Convenor: Rosalie Kennedy

We had a passing of one Northern Rivers PPS support group member, Ron Thornhill, this year. Ron attended our meetings quite regularly. He did not recover from lung surgery and his sister called the Polio NSW office to let them and our Northern Rivers group know.

She also shared lots about Ron and his energetic and resilient nature. He was an engineer who built his own two storey home, and he travelled across Australia and back in his camper van. He was a good painter (he donated some of them to charities and to Polio Conferences for raffles. He was an excellent ping pong player too.

PORT MACQUARIE

Convenor: Gail Hassall

Port Macquarie Post-Polio Support Group meets on the first Saturday of every second month (commencing February) at the Port Macquarie Library.

Fortunately, numbers have remained static during this last year. Early in 2025 we discussed the future of the Group, given there are sometimes fewer than 10 people attending meetings, but there was unanimous agreement to continue for as long as we can.

Port Macquarie Support Group meetings are informal and include morning tea, an exchange of information and an opportunity to discuss issues pertinent to each person. As well as meetings, we have a couple of lunches each year to enable social contact as well as exchanging information if they choose.

Between meetings there is a two-page newsletter sent out that includes information about the previous meeting and other useful notes and references. Members may also contact me at any time by phone or email.

SUTHERLAND

Convenor: Nermeen Sedra

The Sutherland Shire Polio Support Group is 22 years old. We meet monthly at Club Menai on a Wednesday. We've had 11 meetings for the last financial year, as we skip January's meeting. Our numbers are roughly around the 10-12 mark with members coming to meetings, as their circumstances allow. Most of us live locally and either drive or get transport. Some carpool if and when they can. A few of us don't drive and have to organise a ride or an Uber. Some other options are using the services of a local volunteer transit company called Activus Transport.

We previously had meetings in a conference room but that has changed. That conference room is now used as a playroom for kids. We are looking to secure another conference room when the opportunity arises.

We share stories and our plans. We share our pain and our knowledge, our equipment/tools and ways of getting around and staying active. About half our members live alone and utilise the LiveLife Alarms to keep safe in the event of a fall. Most of us use some kind of walking aid. We share our knowledge of products and all types of therapies and medication, that way we pass on our experiences to one another. Like this medication or that doctor or that therapist, it really is a think-tank.

Mostly what we share are our struggles with polio and the effect it has on ourselves, our families, our finances – don't forget about them! We often reflect on our mothers and the struggles they took on in looking after us as infants, also our partners too and in some cases our children. I think one of Ruth's sons had MS and she took it in her stride, together with help from her husband.

Nermeen participated in the inaugural paralympic Dragonboat team in April this year. Nermeen continues to paddle when she's not injured or recovering from a competition. In fact, one of Nermeen's paddling buddies came to a few meetings. She shared some literature, a book called "The Golden Age" about a convalescent home in WA, fascinating reading that was.

Fortunately, though, most of us live in our own homes and have independence and autonomy. That is a great gift, and we are truly grateful for being able to maintain that for as long as possible.

Webinar Report

Gail Hassall – Online Webinar Co-ordinator 2024

In the latter half of 2024 Polio NSW presented two webinars, the first was “Demystifying Dementia”, originally scheduled for August but was postponed due to a bereavement. It was rescheduled for September and conducted by Donna Ward from Group Homes Australia.

It was a very interesting and informative webinar where we learned that dementia is a general term that describes a group of diseases. Each dementia will present differently and respond to different strategies. The most common symptom that is known about dementia is memory loss. However, dementia can impact many different areas of brain function. For example, emotions, the ability to calculate numbers and manage finances, orienting time and place, word searching, and many other symptoms. We need to understand the complexities of communication challenges, including language and memory loss. If you are trying to relate to a person with dementia, don't try to bring them into your reality as their reality is often very different.

Donna also introduced us to Group Homes Australia, which offers unique accommodation and support. They specialise in supporting those with dementia and high care needs to live purposeful and meaningful lives. Smaller care environments have been proven to improve quality of life, reduce rates of depression and reduce hospitalisation for people living with dementia. Currently Group Homes Australia has 23 homes in Sydney and the Central Coast. Each group home accommodates 6-10 people with 24/7 dedicated care.

The second webinar was held in conjunction with the Polio NSW Annual General Meeting in November. Our guest presenter was former Australian Paralympian, Lyn Lillecrapp OAM.

Lyn was born in Albury NSW and unfortunately contracted polio at the age of 6 weeks, but that has never held her back. She had an outstanding sporting career, including representing NSW, Victoria, SA and Australia in many different competitions and championships across the world, and received numerous awards and a swag of medals. In recent years she has been inducted into the SA Swimming Hall of Fame.

She is still actively involved in the sporting world, and over recent years, has also been involved in contributing to and supporting the work of Polio Australia.

Rosalie Kennedy – Online Webinar Co-ordinator 2025

In April, a webinar was presented with the theme of “*Using the Unique Properties of Aquatic Therapy to improve Strength, Conditioning and Mobility for PPS*”. This webinar was presented by Marian Pentecost, who is an accredited Exercise Physiologist.

The presentation began by asking us “Why Water?” – what is the reason for its use in improving mobility, and in conditioning and strengthening muscles?

Hydrotherapy uses the properties of water to achieve specific therapeutic goals.

Why water? Marian outlined the specifics about exercising in water and its clinical applications and showed some slides and videos of an aqua therapy session.

1. Water has density
2. Buoyancy
3. Turbulence
4. Resistance
5. Hydrostatic Pressure
6. Refraction
7. The temperature of water has a part to play