



## Shadow Minister for Health and Medicare

10 May 2019

Mr Andrew Mills  
Chief Executive Officer  
Arthritis Australia  
Via email

Dear Andrew,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me recently, and for your subsequent proposal to assist Australians with arthritis.

As you know, around four million Australians are living with arthritis. While many people think of arthritis as a consequence of ageing, a majority of these people – more than two million – are of working age. Around 6,000 are children.

This means that arthritis has huge economic as well as personal costs, around \$24 billion a year, by one estimate.

Labor believes that the millions of Australians who are living with arthritis deserve the best possible support to manage their condition.

That's why a Shorten Labor Government will meet your request and invest \$2.1 million over three years to improve health outcomes and quality of life for Australians with arthritis by improving access to community-based information, education and support.

In particular, Labor will fund a trial and evaluation of placing health educators in five state and territory arthritis organisations, to provide a range of services for both children and adults.

Labor knows that people diagnosed with arthritis need ready access to information, education and practical support from health professionals so that they can manage their condition.

Too often, those diagnosed with arthritis are left without all the information they need to understand their condition and to make decisions regarding their care.

As you identify, some of those with arthritis are advised to 'put up with' their condition, and the majority report that they are faring badly with their condition and are not receiving the information and support that they need.

This is not good enough – and Labor will make this investment in order to find a better way forward for the millions of Australians living with arthritis.

This investment is on top of measures that are already included for arthritis in the Commonwealth Budget, which Labor will deliver.

It will build on Labor's strong record when it comes to supporting those living with arthritis.

The former Labor Government made significant investments in arthritis research and management. Labor invested over \$45 million in research on musculoskeletal and arthritic conditions through the National Health and Medical Research Council.

Labor also listed and expanded access to arthritis drugs on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). This included Orencia® for severe active rheumatoid arthritis and Humira® for severe active juvenile idiopathic arthritis.

Labor also committed over \$3 million for initiatives like Exercise for Arthritis, in response to evidence that exercise helps improve flexibility, ease pain, and alleviate joint stiffness for people with arthritis.

Labor's commitment also enhanced online support tools for Australians with osteoarthritis via MyJointPain.org.au.

In Opposition, Labor has also fought to protect Medicare, the PBS and public hospitals – all of which are particularly important for people with chronic conditions like arthritis who access health care more often than other Australians.

Thank you again for your proposal and your ongoing advocacy on this important issue.

If Labor is successful at the upcoming election, I look forward to working with you on the implementation of this commitment.

Yours sincerely,



Catherine King