

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**WEDNESDAY 10 May 2023**

**Arthritis Australia welcomes juvenile arthritis funding**  
**Comprehensive response to health and economic impacts of**  
**arthritis still needed**

Arthritis Australia has welcomed a range of federal budget measures that will benefit people living with arthritis but warned that significant further investment will be required to avert the looming health and economic crisis arising from one of Australia's most common and costly health conditions.

"We welcome the government's investment of \$800,000 over 2023-24 for early detection of juvenile arthritis – we know that many Australian children are still being diagnosed far too late, at the risk of severe and irreversible damage and disability," said Arthritis Australia CEO Jonathan Smithers.

"This funding is a great start, but we still need to see a comprehensive response to the recommendations of the Parliamentary Inquiry into childhood rheumatic illness," he said.

"We must address the core national challenge of the current lack of access to specialist and multidisciplinary services that sees children in Australia now receiving a lower standard of care than in other similar countries."

Jonathan continued, "We also strongly welcome measures to reduce the cost of medicines and GP appointments, as well as increased access to the nursing and allied health services that are so important for people living with a chronic illness such as arthritis.

"And we have been calling for the addition of Shingrix to the National Immunisation Program, so we are very pleased to see this funded in the budget. This measure will mean people who are immunocompromised or taking immunosuppressive therapy, and cannot safely take a live virus vaccine, will save over \$600 for the two doses required."

Arthritis Australia states there is still much more that can be done to improve arthritis care and ultimately reduce health system costs such as the huge and growing cost of joint replacement surgery, one of the most expensive items in the health budget.

"By investing in earlier and better management of arthritis, and translation of research into practice, we can start to address these challenges," said Jonathan.

Currently more than 3.6 million Australians, of all ages, are living with one of 100 forms of arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions, representing a leading cause of disability and a total estimated cost to the health system of \$14 billion every year. This represents 13% of

Australia's overall disease burden, equivalent to cardiovascular disease and mental health (both 12%) yet arthritis remains a low priority in terms of provision of health services and research funding.

Musculoskeletal conditions including arthritis received 60% lower funding from the National Health and Medical Research Council in 2021 than cardiovascular disease or mental health – with investment declining year on year, it is now at its lowest level in a decade.

The number of Australians with arthritis - including rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis and juvenile forms - is growing fast, as the population increases and people live longer. An overall loss of \$9.4 billion in GDP is projected in 2030 due to the impact of arthritis on the labour force via lost income, additional welfare payments, and lost taxation revenue.

### **About Arthritis Australia**

Arthritis Australia is the peak national body for arthritis, advocating on behalf of over 3.6 million Australians living with arthritis, and working with many other arthritis organisations to deliver information and support to people living with more than 100 types of arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions. We are a leading non-government funder of arthritis research in Australia and advocate for policies, programs and funding initiatives that will improve the health and wellbeing of people living with arthritis.

Visit: [www.arthritisaustralia.com.au](http://www.arthritisaustralia.com.au)

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