



Communique – Consumers and health leaders meet in Canberra to consider the urgent need for better care for arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions

Almost 100 consumers and health leaders met with Ministers and politicians in Canberra last week in order to call for better, earlier care that is affordable and accessible to all Australians living with musculoskeletal conditions, at a policy summit organised by Arthritis Australia.

Musculoskeletal conditions, including arthritis and back pain, affect around 7 million people or 1 in 3 Australians, and are a leading cause of chronic pain and early retirement due to ill health. As our most expensive disease group, they cost the health system almost \$15 billion dollars a year, and people living with these conditions spend thousands in out of pocket healthcare expenses. But there is evidence that some of this money is spent on the wrong care, and Australia is not getting the best return on its investment.

Clinical science has made great advances in understanding what works for chronic musculoskeletal pain, including world leading research funded by the Australian Government.

But consumers are frustrated that they don't have affordable access to the care that the scientific evidence supports and clinical guidelines recommend. They are making difficult decisions every day between paying for bills, food and essentials, or the medicines, allied health and medical appointments they need.

Knee and hip replacements for osteoarthritis cost the health budget billions of dollars a year even before accounting for the costs to patients, while alternatives that could delay or prevent the need for a significant proportion of these surgeries go unfunded. The Australian Government's Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare has set a standard of care involving allied health support for physical activity and weight loss, and symptom management. This is not just effective for arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions, but many other chronic diseases too. The crucial next step is for governments to better fund this care so that it is accessible and affordable to all who need it.

Patients should not have to wait until their condition is severe enough to warrant surgery - they need support to manage their symptoms and improve their health at a much earlier stage.

Arthritis Australia is joining with people living with chronic musculoskeletal pain, clinicians, researchers, policymakers and industry in calling for:

- Funding and enabling delivery of cost-effective, coordinated lifestyle behavioural models of care for arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions, with equitable access for rural and regional and priority populations
- More affordable access to allied healthcare for Australians who need it
- Support for consumer education and health system navigation
- Supporting and enabling the multidisciplinary workforce to provide better care, including addressing workforce shortages
- Funding an arthritis and musculoskeletal research Mission that is commensurate with the disease burden and economic impact of these conditions

If you have any questions or would like to sign onto the communique please send an email to lhardy@arthritisaustralia.com.au