The Burden of Arthritis on South Australia 2017

The faces of Arthritis

As the key peak body representing people with Arthritis in South Australia, Arthritis SA is committed to work collaboratively with key stakeholders and the government to implement the osteoarthritis model of care for South Australia.

Arthritis SA invites the state and federal governments to commit resources to enable the coordinated development of the model of care and then its implementation through the services they fund or operated.

The key to success is a collaborative approach to osteoarthritis that links advocates, consumers, governments and health providers.

Now is the time to act!

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A message from the President of Arthritis SA

Arthritis is one of the most common, disabling and costly chronic health care conditions in our state, with more than half of those affected being of working age.1 For over 40 years, Arthritis SA has provided support for people with arthritis, through education, advocacy and funded research. As the peak organisation representing people living with arthritis in South Australia, we are committed to working with the government and other partners to implement changes to benefit people with arthritis. Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis in South Australia. In 2016 there were 9,184 hip and knee replacements in South Australia 2, the majority of these as a consequence of osteoarthritis. Research has demonstrated that joint replacement numbers can be reduced with early intervention and self-management programs. Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) affects over 36,000 people in South Australia of which approximately 58% are of working age.3 This disease along with other auto-immune variations of arthritis require ongoing treatment and multidisciplinary care to slow down their progression in individuals. Children get arthritis too! In South Australia there are approximately 600 children with Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis (JIA); in many cases children with JIA will continue to have arthritis into adulthood and this can become a lifelong challenge. There is a lot to be done to improve the quality of life for people with arthritis. Other States (NSW, WA and VIC) have already developed Models of Care for osteoarthritis, RA and JIA. Commonwealth and state government support including funding has been essential to develop these models. South Australia is lagging behind despite our ageing population. Nationally, 1 in 5 people have arthritis but here in South Australia the number is 1 in 4.

The time has come to act.

Arthritis SA has established credible relationships with relevant stakeholders. As our first priority we have begun the process of co-ordinating the development of a Model of Care for osteoarthritis. The Second Australian Atlas of Healthcare Variation has identified that 57% of people with osteoarthritis do not receive care concordant with guidelines. This is an issue that affects both the individual and the state health budget.4

Arthritis SA look forward to working with government and other partners to address and reduce the burden of osteoarthritis across the State and, in so doing improve social and economic outcomes for South Australia.

Colette Smith - President

What is a model of care?

A model of care provides an evidence-based and consultation-informed framework that describes how services and other resources should be delivered to people living with specific health conditions.5 An osteoarthritis model of care will help ensure people with osteoarthritis receive the best care at the right time across the disease continuum, from early diagnosis through to advanced stages of the condition. This model of care aims to reduce pain, increase mobility and improve quality of life for people in South Australia with this often-debilitating condition. Core to the model is a patient centred approach where people with osteoarthritis are provided with high quality timely information on the nature of disease progression and self-management and coping strategies.

Why do we need a state wide model of care for osteoarthritis?

• Only 43% of people with osteoarthritis receive care that is concordant with guidelines. Current management of osteoarthritis is largely episodic, auto-immune variations of arthritis require ongoing treatment and multidisciplinary care to slow down their progression in individuals.
• In 2012, 2.8 of every 100 GP-patient encounters were for osteoarthritis; general practice is key to implementing evidence based practice but needs assistance including referral pathways to multidisciplinary teams.6
• Between 2004-5 and 2013-14 osteoarthritis hospitalisations rates increased by 15%, primarily related to hip and knee replacements, which increased by 25% and 32%, respectively.
• In 2016 there were 9,184 hip and knee replacements in SA7.
• Evidence shows that progression of the disease can be slowed, pain can be relieved, disability can be minimised and the need for surgery may even be postponed or avoided with appropriate multidisciplinary treatment including exercise, weight loss and other chronic care interventions that address the needs of these people holistically.8
• People with osteoarthritis frequently have comorbidities such as cardiovascular disease. This makes it more difficult for people to self-manage their conditions in the community. A Model of Care would set out pathways to ensure effective care is put in place.
• Arthritis SA’s contact with consumers shows too many people in South Australia are struggling to cope with their osteoarthritis as a result of poor access to the care, information and support on how to manage their condition.
• People in rural and remote areas have reduced access to services and supports and this requires urgent attention. 10

Models of care for osteoarthritis have been successfully introduced in Western Australia, Victoria (with a focus on hip and knees) and New South Wales - it is time for South Australians with osteoarthritis to have these benefits.

What will an osteoarthritis model of care achieve?

We estimate that if the government implemented a state-wide osteoarthritis model of care the annual cost of arthritis in South Australia could be reduced by 10% representing savings of $50million a year. Early diagnosis and the initiation of preventative measures have been shown to be very successful for people with osteoarthritis. Simple measures such as weight management and exercise for example, can minimise the risk of further joint damage in later life. This can result in a person having a more productive life and a substantial cost savings to the health system if they can avoid expensive joint replacements and surgical procedures in later life and continue to be active in the workplace. A reduction in the number of MRIs and arthroscopies performed will also result in major savings in expensive investigations. There will be reduced health care costs through more appropriate, timely and cost-effective care. The utilisation of medical and allied health professionals to provide patient information, education, and psychosocial support will be a key to the success of this program so that timely and appropriate care for people especially those in rural and remote areas will enable them to lead healthier and more independent lives.11,12

We want to see a patient centred approach to osteoarthritis that sees improved access to all services across our whole state that sees all people with osteoarthritis benefit.

The Model of Care needs to be complemented by promoting and maintaining a vital health research agenda in SA in the area of osteoarthritis as well as the implementation of workplace strategies to assist workplaces respond appropriately to employees with arthritis and to improve the quality of life of these employees and increase productivity and decrease early retirement.

The Burden of Arthritis

• Arthritis and other musculoskeletal health conditions are the most common cause of long-term disability in South Australia.
• In 2015 the healthcare costs for arthritis in South Australia were nearly $550 million. With the ageing and increasing level of obesity of the population, this annual cost burden to South Australia is projected to reach nearly $600 million by the year 2030.8
• In South Australia, in 2016, the self-reported prevalence of arthritis among adults 18 years and over was 23.6%, with the prevalence of Osteoarthritis – 16.3%. 5 This equates to approximately 220,000 South Australian adults currently reporting that they have Osteoarthritis. Nearly 6,000 South Australians aged 45-64 years do not work because of their arthritis, at an annual cost to the economy of more than $660 million.1
• People with osteoarthritis are 2.8 times as likely to report severe and very severe pain than those without osteoarthritis.5

Osteoarthritis is a degenerative condition that mostly affects the hands, spine and joints such as hips, knees and ankles, and usually gets worse over time. It is the predominant condition that leads to hip and knee replacements in Australia.