



PREVENT,  
TRANSFORM, CURE

The Arthritis Research UK Manifesto



# Arthritis attacks what it means to live

For 10 million people across the UK, the limitations of arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions make simple activities a daily struggle. From going to work, and interacting with family, to socialising with friends, or popping to the shops, people with arthritis cannot take these moments for granted. Many spend years with severe pain and fatigue, often experiencing anxiety or depression.

Alongside the personal impact, musculoskeletal conditions have a huge impact on society. They amount to the third largest area of NHS spending, with an annual budget of £4.8 billion, and are the cause of one in five working days lost in the UK.

At Arthritis Research UK we want everyone to have fuller lives with arthritis today, and without it tomorrow. To make this a reality, people with musculoskeletal conditions must have timely access to high quality health and social care, be enabled to stay in, and return to work, while being supported when their condition prevents them from doing so, and receive new and effective treatments.

We work alongside other charities to improve the lives of people with arthritis across the UK by supplying high quality information and support, investing in breakthrough research and treatments, and providing policy insight and feedback.

## We cannot do this alone

**We need MPs to stand up for the people in their constituency with arthritis by becoming Arthritis Champions, and working with us to ensure people with arthritis can live fuller, more independent, lives.**

Decision makers must act now to reduce the impact of arthritis, both on those living with it, and on wider society. We need urgent action to prevent more people from developing arthritis, to transform the lives of people already living with the condition, and to help cure it altogether.

### ■ **Sign up today to become an Arthritis Champion and support our four calls to action:**

- Make musculoskeletal conditions a public health priority.
- Ensure people have timely access to health and care services that enable them to improve their musculoskeletal health.
- Ensure people with musculoskeletal conditions have fair and timely access to services that support them to be in work, including financial support.
- Protect the UK's position as a global leader in science and sustain the benefits of the life-science sector to the economy.

# 1 Make musculoskeletal conditions a public health priority

## The problem

The number of people with arthritis is increasing. There are several causes of musculoskeletal conditions, and not all can be prevented. Factors that can increase the likelihood of developing some forms of arthritis include age, obesity and physical inactivity, yet many people are unaware that something can be done to lessen or prevent the impact of arthritis.

## The solution

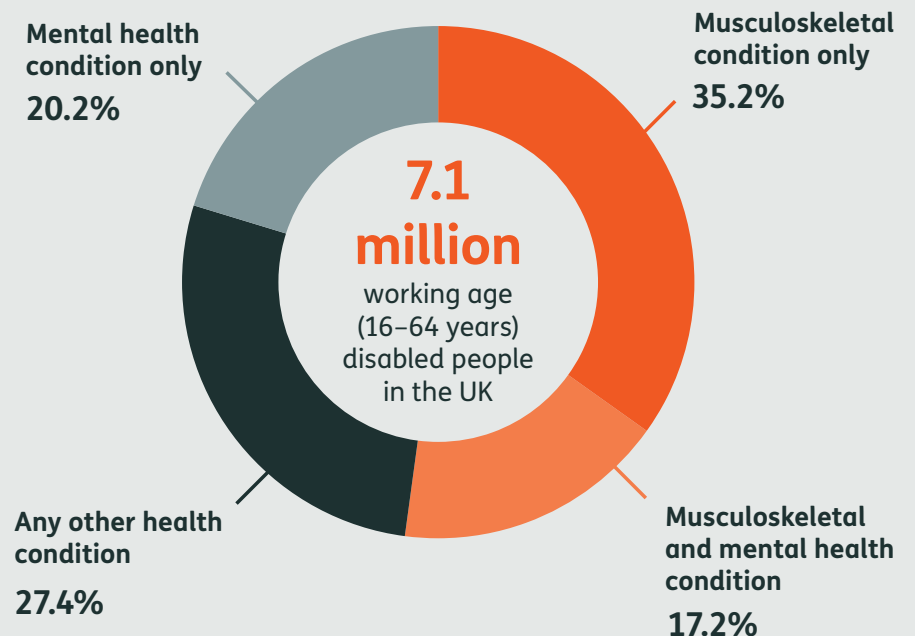
A public health approach should be adopted urgently to promote life-long musculoskeletal health. The public should be encouraged to exercise and maintain a healthy weight, which will reduce their chance of developing osteoarthritis, and lessen the impact of existing problems. In order to make this a reality, more data is needed.

- **Local authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups should map their current provision of local physical activity and weight management services that are appropriate for people with musculoskeletal conditions, and address gaps.**

Public health and clinical teams should develop systems so that people with musculoskeletal conditions are directed towards, and can find, the most appropriate services for them.

Arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions are the most common cause of disability in adults in the UK.

**52.4%** of all working age (16–64 years) disabled people in the UK have a musculoskeletal condition.



Source: Labour Force Survey April to June 2016

- **NHS England must work with stakeholders to deliver the NHS Mandate commitment to urgently improve the quality and availability of data about people with arthritis and the services they use (across health and social care, public health, welfare provision).**

Opportunities to include musculoskeletal conditions in local planning documents (JSNAs, STPs), national data sets and surveys are being missed. In 2015, only one local authority included osteoarthritis in their joint health and wellbeing strategy. This trend is worrying. It's imperative that more local authorities put measures in place to understand the impact of arthritis, both on their local residents and the council's budget, and take action to improve the way services are planned and delivered.



## 2 Ensure people have timely access to health and care services that enable them to improve their musculoskeletal health

### The problem

The pain and disability of musculoskeletal conditions can limit people's independence and their ability to participate in many aspects of family, social and working life. The impact on the health and care sector is huge: currently one in five people (20%) consult a GP about a musculoskeletal problem each year. Treatment and support for people with chronic pain, such as back pain or osteoarthritis, has been estimated to account for 4.6 million appointments per year, comparable to 793 full time GPs.

### The solution

Living with the daily impact of arthritis makes people with musculoskeletal conditions experts in what they need to do to achieve their full potential. It's essential that their opinions are considered alongside health and care professionals when planning, developing and monitoring their treatment. The NHS and care services must do more to enable people with arthritis to self-manage their condition, including upholding NHS Constitution commitments to access services. It's vital these commitments are maintained so that people with arthritis have timely access to primary and secondary care, and their concerns are taken seriously.

- **Ensure that the NICE Quality Standard for the treatment of people with suspected rheumatoid and early inflammatory arthritis is met.**

Urgent, intensive specialist treatment is much more effective for people with inflammatory arthritis. However, the National Clinical Audit (2016) found that the Quality Standard is often unmet. Only 20% of referrals from a GP to a rheumatology unit occur within 3 days. Only 37% of people referred from a GP are seen in rheumatology within 3 weeks.

- **Ensure all Clinical Commissioning Groups assess the potential of implementing self-referral for physiotherapy.**

Self-referral to physiotherapy is available across Scotland and much of Wales. Evidence indicates that self-referral to physiotherapy can be cost-effective, improve outcomes, and lead to greater patient satisfaction, as well as having support from GPs and physiotherapists. However, only a third of Clinical Commissioning Groups currently offer self-referral.

### 3 Ensure people with musculoskeletal conditions have fair and timely access to services that support them to be in work, including financial support

#### The problem

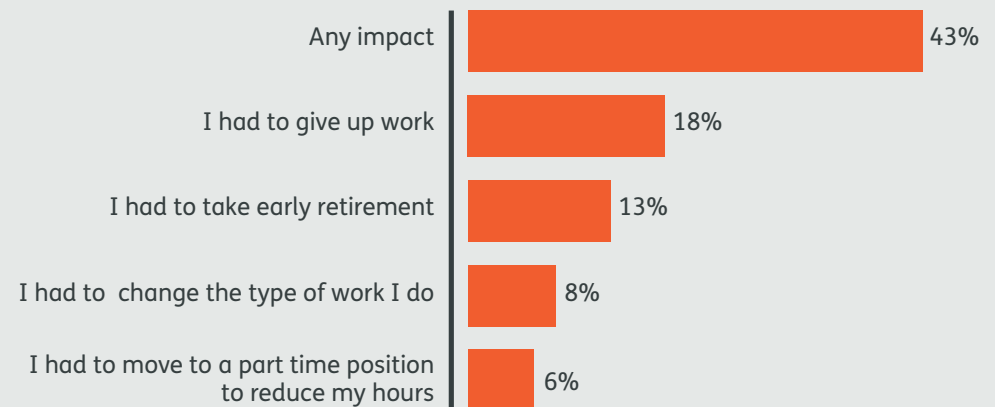
Too few people with arthritis have the right support to stay in, and return to, work. This failing has a major impact on both individuals, and wider society. For people with arthritis, being employed offers security and financial independence, and can increase positive mental health. We therefore believe that everyone who feels able to, should have the opportunity to work. With over half of all working-age disabled people in the UK living with a musculoskeletal condition, it's vital that the Government provides the right support for people with arthritis to stay in the work place where possible.

Currently, only 60% of people with a musculoskeletal condition are in work, and over 30 million working days were lost in the UK due to musculoskeletal problems in 2016.

The impact on the UK is huge. In 2007 the total annual cost to the economy, of working-age ill health, which included lost productivity, sickness absence and informal care, was estimated to be £103–129 billion.

People with musculoskeletal conditions are less likely to be employed than people in good health and are more likely to retire early.

**43%** of working-age people diagnosed with arthritis\* said their condition impacted on their own working life, or on their partner's working life where their partner assumed a caring role for them.



Source: Responses from the Arthritis Nation (2014) Survey

\* Includes responses from 925 participants with arthritis (osteoarthritis [608], rheumatoid arthritis [157] and gout [66]) asked if their arthritis affected their working life or their partner's life.

## The solution

These issues must be addressed by supporting people with arthritis to stay in work as long as they are willing and able, and to support them through the welfare system when they are unable to work.

- **Undertake wider promotion of the Access to Work scheme through an information campaign targeting people with musculoskeletal conditions.**

In 2013-14, 24% of people who used Access to Work (8,650 people) did so because of problems with their arms and hands, legs or feet or back and neck (i.e. musculoskeletal conditions). However, awareness of this scheme, which provides practical support so that people can start work, or stay in work, is low. We believe many more people could benefit if they knew about the practical support the scheme offers.

**People must be supported to stay in work as long as they are willing and able**



## 4 Protect the UK's position as a global leader in science and sustain the benefits of the life-science sector to the economy

### The problem

Medical research charities like Arthritis Research UK are a vital part of the research sector. Our work has already uncovered breakthrough treatments, and we're dedicated to uncovering new ideas to help people push back the ways arthritis limits their lives. Together we support over 40% of publicly funded research, with investment totalling £1.4 billion in 2015.

Science is a global concern, and the UK medical research sector is supported by close links with international partners.

### The solution

Action is needed to ensure the UK remains a leading force in medical research, delivering jobs, economic growth, and above all cutting-edge treatments for UK patients.

- **Ensure the collaborative nature of research is maintained by a simple immigration framework for skilled scientists and health professionals.**

International movement is a feature of researchers' careers which must be maintained. 72% of UK-based researchers spend time at non-UK institutions, alongside this 88% of the UK public supports maintained or increased migration of highly skilled workers.

- **Recognise and maintain the benefits of a UK regulatory system harmonised with the EU framework.**

Harmonised regulation enables people with rare forms of arthritis to benefit from participating in pan-EU trials. International research is necessary to provide the scale to generate meaningful results.

- **Ensure continued UK participation in EU research programmes, and access to EU-facilitated networks and schemes, with existing funding guaranteed.**

During 2014/15, Arthritis Research UK funded over £16.5 million of research which was hosted in the UK, and involved collaboration with EU researchers. In 2015/16 we invested over £5 million supporting grant holders in the EU, delivering pan-EU clinical trials and supporting research consortia.

# £120,000,000

Arthritis Research UK funds more than 300 research awards across the UK worth over £120 million



## What next?

It's essential that every MP understands the impact that arthritis has on people's lives, and fights to improve the situation for people affected, their friends and family, as well as wider society and the economy.

Work with us to champion the prevention, transformation and cure of musculoskeletal conditions, whilst improving the lives of those living with arthritis that you wish to represent.

Pledge to become an Arthritis Champion today, and support us to achieve the goals in this manifesto during the next parliament.

■ **Sign up today to become an Arthritis Champion.**



**Arthritis Research UK is the charity dedicated to stopping the devastating impact that arthritis has on people's lives.**

Everything that we do is focused on taking the pain away and keeping people active. Our remit covers all conditions which affect the joints, bones and muscles including osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, back pain and osteoporosis. Together, these conditions affect millions of people across the UK and account for the third largest NHS programme annual budget spend of £4.8 billion in England. We fund research into the cause, treatment and cure of arthritis and we provide information on how to maintain healthy joints and bones and how to live well with arthritis. We also champion the cause, influence policy change and work in partnership with others to achieve our aims. We depend on public support and the generosity of our donors to keep doing this vital work.

**Contact our policy team for further information:  
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