

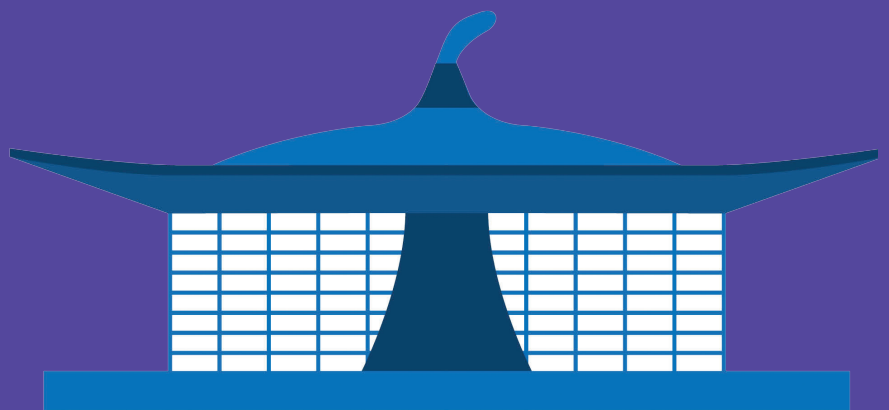
# MS WELCOME PACK

## HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH ARTHRITIS

### What's included in your pack

1. Introduction from the Director of Cymru Versus Arthritis
2. Why arthritis matters
3. Our services
4. How you can help in the Senedd and in your constituency / region
5. Become a Senedd Arthritis Champion - print for Social Media post

**CYMRU**  
**VERSUS**  
**ARTHRITIS**



**Approximately 970,000 people are living with musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions such as arthritis in Wales, with more than half experiencing pain every day. For many, this is life-limiting pain, which can make even the simplest of tasks challenging.**

Arthritis can strike at any age and can rob you of your independence and ability to work. It can impact on your relationships and on your mental health. Yet it is too often dismissed and trivialised as ‘just a bit of arthritis’. This is unacceptable and we want to see change.



The pandemic has been especially challenging for people with arthritis. Many have been shielding. Many have had life-changing treatments and services, such as joint replacement surgery, postponed and now face a much longer wait in severe and worsening pain.

Versus Arthritis wants arthritis to be recognised and acted upon as a policy priority. Our Manifesto 2021 sets out a number of policy calls that show how that can be done.<sup>1</sup> For example, the need to prioritise bringing down the now longer waiting times for orthopaedics, and, crucially, supporting people waiting longer for surgery to maintain their mental health and activity levels as they wait.

In the 5th Senedd, working with MSs from across the parties, our campaigning led to real, tangible change. For example, following our cross party supported campaign, a new paediatric rheumatology service for children with arthritis in South and Mid Wales was established at the Noah’s Ark Children’s Hospital for Wales. There is also a new strategy to improve adult MSK health care services currently in public consultation.

We would like to see a Wales where nobody faces the challenges of arthritis alone. You can help us by signposting constituents into our services – via our helpline on 0800 5200 520 – and by engaging with our campaigns. This pack’s ‘Our services’ and ‘How you can help...’ sections provide more information. And please remember that our policy team is here to provide information on relevant policy issues, please feel free to contact us at [PolicySupportCymru@versusarthritis.org](mailto:PolicySupportCymru@versusarthritis.org)

I very much look forward to working with you.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary Cowern'.

**Mary Cowern**  
**Director**  
**Cymru Versus Arthritis**

# WHY ARTHRITIS MATTERS

Arthritis and related musculoskeletal conditions affect 970,000 in Wales, 20.3 million people across the UK,<sup>2</sup> and are among the biggest causes of pain and disability.<sup>3</sup> As the population ages and with increased levels of inactivity and obesity, the prevalence of arthritis is expected to rise.

- **Arthritis can affect anyone** – it can strike at any age, including childhood.
- **Impacts all aspects of life** – it can take away people's independence and can impair ability to participate in family, social and working life. Common symptoms include persistent pain, stiffness, fatigue and a loss of mobility and dexterity.
- **Mental health** - depression is four times more common among people in persistent pain compared with those without pain.<sup>4</sup>

The profound impact of arthritis and MSK conditions is not only felt at the personal level.

- **Health and social care costs** - cumulatively, the UK healthcare cost of arthritis will reach £118.6 billion over the next decade.<sup>5</sup> In Wales, the total NHS spend on MSK problems (excl. trauma) in 2018-19 equates to £379 million.<sup>6</sup>
- **Economic costs** – only 62% of people with MSK conditions across the UK are in work compared with 81% of people who do not have MSK conditions.<sup>7</sup> A staggering 28.4 million days are lost to MSK conditions across the UK each year.<sup>8</sup>
- **Health inequalities** – 20% of people who live in the most deprived fifth of society in Wales report a long-standing MSK condition compared to 13% in the least deprived quintile.<sup>9</sup>

Prevention and self-management must be a key part of our approach to arthritis and MSK conditions.

- Regular physical activity and exercise can **reduce the risk** of many musculoskeletal conditions, including osteoarthritis, back pain, neck pain, falls and fractures.<sup>10, 11, 12, 13</sup>
- Further, physical activity, as part of a wider **self-management approach for those already living with an MSK condition**, can help limit the impact of the condition.<sup>14</sup>



# OUR SERVICES

Cymru Versus Arthritis works alongside volunteers, healthcare professionals, researchers and supporters to do everything we can to push back against arthritis. Our remit covers all musculoskeletal conditions which affect the joints, bones and muscles, including osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, gout, fibromyalgia, back pain, osteoporosis, lupus, ankylosing spondylitis, psoriatic arthritis, juvenile idiopathic arthritis and over 100 more.

- Our UK helpline brings all of our information, publications and advice into one place. **0800 5200 520**, open Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm.
- Our CWTCH Cymru<sup>15</sup> service is creating peer groups and local support to promote self-management skills and knowledge to empower people to reduce the impact of the conditions they live with.
- Our Young People and Families Service provides support to children, young people and families living with childhood arthritis and MSK conditions.
- We create online videos and programmes to promote activity levels for people with MSK conditions and produce award winning publications on all aspects of living with arthritis.
- We fund research and develop breakthrough treatments, including £3m invested in research in Wales.
- We campaign for arthritis to be the health policy priority it should be.



In January 2020, our 'Get Active for Arthritis' event at the Senedd generated national media coverage to raise awareness of the benefits of exercise as a form of self-management for people with arthritis.

# HOW YOU CAN HELP IN THE SENEDD AND IN YOUR CONSTITUENCY/REGION



**Be a Senedd Arthritis Champion** to champion issues that affect people with arthritis in your constituency / region – simply tweet a picture of yourself with the attached printable A4 poster.

*Suggested tweet wording:*

*I'm very pleased to be a #SeneddArthritisChampion. I will do what I can to help @CymruVArthritis / @VersusArthritis push back against the pain of arthritis in [name of constituency/region]. If you live with arthritis, lots of useful info at: [www.versusarthritis.org](http://www.versusarthritis.org)*

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**Signpost to Versus Arthritis** if a constituent with an arthritis or MSK condition visits your advice surgery, you can refer them to our helpline – **0800 5200 520** or our website **[versusarthritis.org/get-help/](http://versusarthritis.org/get-help/)** for information and support. Let us know if you'd like a helplines poster for your constituency office.

*You can also occasionally tweet a reminder to constituents about our services:*

*If you live with arthritis in [name of constituency/region], @VersusArthritis offers a range of info and support services. Their helpline number is 0800 5200 520. Lots more info on their website: [www.versusarthritis.org](http://www.versusarthritis.org) @CymruVArthritis*

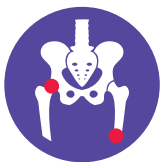
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**Table a written question** or ask an oral question on our behalf.

Our policy team covers a range of issues impacting people with arthritis, such as prevention, health and social care, aids and adaptations and employment.

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**Support our campaigns**, our 'Impossible to Ignore' campaign focusses on reducing orthopaedic waiting times that have grown through the pandemic and to support people waiting longer for surgery. We are also calling for wider MSK services, such as rheumatology services, to be integral to NHS recovery planning. With cross party support, we have successfully campaigned for a national arthritis strategy (currently in public consultation) and for a new paediatric rheumatology service for children with arthritis, now operational.

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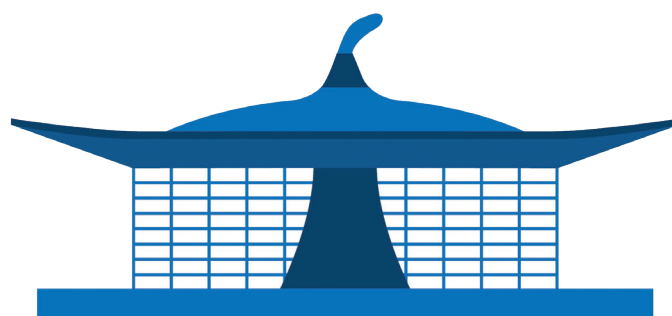
**Meet with us** to discuss policy priorities for people with arthritis.

We would be happy to arrange a meeting with you at your convenience -

**[PolicySupportCymru@versusarthritis.org](mailto:PolicySupportCymru@versusarthritis.org)**

**I AM A  
SENEDD  
ARTHRITIS  
CHAMPION**

**CYMRU  
VERSUS  
ARTHRITIS**



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- <sup>[1]</sup> Visit the Versus Arthritis website to download our Manifesto 2021: <https://www.versusarthritis.org/campaign-with-us/campaigning-across-the-nations/wales/>
- <sup>[2]</sup> It is difficult to accurately determine how many people have arthritis only or arthritis and other MSK conditions in the UK. The data currently available on specific conditions comes from several different sources (e.g. modelled estimates, national surveys, and registers) and is most often not routinely collected. We currently rely on the Global Burden of Disease study to provide us with an estimate of the total number of people with any MSK condition in the UK today. This estimate covers some of the most prevalent MSK conditions including osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, gout, low back pain, neck pain, and other MSK conditions.
- <sup>[3]</sup> Global Burden of Disease Study 2019 (GBD 2019) Results. Seattle, United States : Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), 2020.
- <sup>[4]</sup> J. Lepine and M. Briley. The epidemiology of pain in depression. *Human Psychopharmacology*, vol. 19, no. S1, pp. S3-S7, 2004.
- <sup>[5]</sup> York Health Economics Consortium (2017). The Cost of Arthritis in the United Kingdom. (Unpublished)
- <sup>[6]</sup> NHS [Wales] Expenditure Programme Budgets 2018-19. <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2020-04/nhs-expenditure-programme-budgets-april-2018-march-2019-371.pdf>
- <sup>[7]</sup> Office for National Statistics (2021). Quarterly Labour Force Survey October-December 2020.
- <sup>[8]</sup> Office for National Statistics (2021). Sickness Absence in the UK labour market: 2020. Available at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/labourproductivity/articles/sicknessabsenceinthelabourmarket/2020#:~:text=It%20fell%20to%201.8%25%20in,down%20from%203.1%25%20in%201995.&text=Looking%20at%20the%20other%20measures,since%20records%20began%20in%201995> .
- <sup>[9]</sup> Welsh Government. Office for National Statistics. National Survey for Wales 2019-20. Adults general health and illness by WIMD quintile. Available online, 2021. <https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/National-Survey-for-Wales/Population-Health/Adult-general-health-and-illness/genhealthillness-by-wimddeprivation>.
- <sup>[10]</sup> B. Choi, J. Verbeek, W. Tam and J. Jiang. Exercises for prevention of recurrences of low-back pain. *The Cochrane Database for Systematic Reviews*, vol. 1, 2010.
- <sup>[11]</sup> M. Hurley, K. Dickson, R. Hallett, R. Grant, H. Hauari, N. Walsh, C. Stansfield and S. Oliver. Exercise interventions and patient beliefs for people with hip, knee or hip and knee osteoarthritis: a mixed methods review. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, no. 4, 2018.
- <sup>[12]</sup> Department of Health, Physical Activity, Health Improvement and Protection. Start Active, Stay Active: A report on physical activity from the four home countries' Chief Medical Officers, Department of Health, London, 2011.
- <sup>[13]</sup> C. Foster, M. Armstrong, M. Hillsdon, D. Skelton, A. Mavroei, N. Cavill and K. Milton. Muscle and bone strengthening and balance activities for general health benefits in adults and older adults: Summary of a rapid evidence review for the UK Chief Medical Officers' update of the physical activity guidelines. Public Health England, London, 2017.
- <sup>[14]</sup> Smith, B. E. et al. (2019). Musculoskeletal pain and exercise—challenging existing paradigms and introducing new. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 53(144), pp. 907-912.
- <sup>[15]</sup> CWTCH Cymru stands for Communities Working Together Can Help Cymru. Three year project, funded by the Welsh Government.