



MEDIA RELEASE

Arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions burden more than six million Australians

Arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions are large contributors to illness, pain and disability in Australia, according to a report released today by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).

The report, *Arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions in Australia*, is the first of its kind, designed to generate national baseline information on the subject.

Report author Dr Naila Rahman, from the AIHW's National Centre for Monitoring Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Conditions, said that around 6.1 million Australians are estimated to have arthritis or a musculoskeletal condition. A large proportion of them, almost one in five, say they have activity limitations associated with their condition.

'In addition to pain, restricted mobility is the most commonly reported problem by persons with arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions. This pain often results in limitations on activities of daily living, such as going out of the house, getting in and out of bed, and in performing many household chores,' Dr Rahman said.

The effects of rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis can be particularly insidious.

A large number of joint replacements in Australia, in particular knee and hip replacements, are due to osteoarthritis. Joint replacements increased from almost 30,000 procedures in 1997-98 to close to 40,000 in 2003-04, and that number is likely to increase as the Australian population ages,' said the report co-author Dr Kuldeep Bhatia.

Costs associated with long-term treatment and management of arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions accounted for the third largest component of health expenditure in Australia in 2000-01, with an estimated expenditure of \$4.6 billion.

Report co-author, Ms Elizabeth Penm, said those costs are likely to increase.

'Because the Australian population is aging, surgical procedures such as knee and hip replacements are increasing, and more effective, but costly prescription drugs, such as COX-2 inhibitors and biologic response modifiers, have been introduced over the last several years, we're likely to see continued higher costs in this area.

'The news is not all bad though,' Dr Rahman added. 'Many people disabled by arthritis can be treated. Technological innovations like assistive devices, home changes, and occupational modifications, should all help to improve the opportunities for independent living.'

Canberra, 27 October 2005

Further information: Naila Rahman, AIHW, tel. 02 6244 1057 or 0407 915 851

Kuldeep Bhatia, AIHW, tel. 02 6244 1144 or 0417 880 300

For media copies of the report: Publications Officer, tel. 02 6244 1032.

UNDER EMBARGO – Strictly not for publication before 1.00 am, Monday 31 October 2005

26 Thynne Street
Fern Hill Park
Bruce ACT
GPO Box 570
Canberra ACT 2601
Ph 02 6244 1000
Fax 02 6244 1299