



Arthritis Care is calling for arthritis to be recognised as one of the nation's health priorities.

An estimated **480,000 people** in Wales live with the pain of arthritis. Musculoskeletal conditions are already a leading cause of disability and work absence, and with an ageing population and the rise in obesity levels, the prevalence of arthritis is set to grow.

We are calling for:

- ***Recognition of arthritis as a health priority.***
- ***Early intervention and timely access to treatments and person-centred services.***
- ***A strong focus on prevention***
- ***Wider access to supported self-management***

Recognition of arthritis as a health priority

There are many myths and misconceptions about arthritis. There is a lack of awareness that arthritis can strike at any age - 15,000 children in the UK have arthritis and rheumatoid arthritis most commonly starts when people are of working age. There is a lack of understanding of the devastating impact arthritis can have on individuals and their families and how much it costs our nation – for the NHS, social services and the economy. Yet much can be done to reduce the impact of arthritis.

Arthritis – the facts...

- Arthritis can strike at any age and impacts on a significant number of people – 10 million in the UK. In a recent survey, a third of respondents in Wales with osteoarthritis received their diagnosis under the age of 45 – more than any other UK nation.
- There are over 200 arthritis conditions. The causes of those conditions vary widely, but many share common symptoms such as pain, inflammation, joint stiffness, fatigue and restricted mobility and joint movement. Due to the nature of the symptoms, arthritis is often a 'hidden' condition. An estimated 71% of people with osteoarthritis are in constant pain and an estimated 87% are concerned about maintaining their independence in the future because of their condition.
- The impact on the NHS and the economy are staggering. Musculoskeletal conditions account for 30% of GP consultations and 42% of reported cases of work-related ill health. One in three people with rheumatoid arthritis give up work within two years of a diagnosis.

We are calling on Assembly candidates and their parties to recognise arthritis as a leading health priority in Wales. We are asking candidates to become Assembly Arthritis Advocates and to work with us to raise awareness and understanding of these devastating conditions.

Prevention

With an ageing population, the numbers of people living with arthritis is set to increase, however future prevalence can be influenced by policies and behaviour now. Increasing physical activity and maintaining a healthy body weight can impact on a person's chances of developing a musculoskeletal condition. Promoting good musculoskeletal health should be a priority in Wales.

Arthritis Care is calling on Assembly candidates to support prioritising public health programmes that promote exercise, healthy diets and that work to reduce obesity. We need to do more in Wales to raise awareness of the link between healthy lifestyles and healthy joints, bones, and muscles.

Early intervention, timely access to the right treatments and person-centred services

For people with a suspected inflammatory arthritis such as rheumatoid arthritis, early referral and assessment by rheumatology services is vital in preventing disability. However, many people are experiencing waiting times that fall outside established standards. Only 28% of people with new inflammatory arthritis in Wales are seen in a rheumatology service within the NICE target of 3 weeks - the lowest rate in Wales and England.

Many people with arthritis are coping with the daily pain of arthritis with pain killers alone when so much more can be done to limit the impact of the condition. People with arthritis should be supported to be fully involved in their health care and should be offered a personalised care plan, yet too often people go without such plans.

Current long waiting times for elective orthopaedic services are unacceptable and can have a devastating impact for an individual living with arthritis.

Wales needs a dedicated multidisciplinary paediatric rheumatology service, yet current service provision is patchy, piecemeal and incomplete - services for children with arthritis have not been prioritised. Many children are travelling to services in England due to the lack of provision in Wales.

Arthritis Care led the campaign to extend free prescription charges and we are calling on all parties to safeguard access to free prescriptions for people with chronic long term conditions such as arthritis.

Arthritis Care also led the campaign for All Wales Directives for arthritis related health services. Those Directives are now nearly a decade old and many of its action points, though still relevant, have not been fulfilled. Arthritis Care is calling for the Assembly Government to update those Directives and develop a robust Implementation Plan that will drive forward person-centred health care for all people with arthritis in Wales.

Arthritis Care is calling on Assembly candidates to support our campaign to improve arthritis related health care services in Wales.

Supported Self-Management

Arthritis Care has been at the forefront of the movement to promote supported self-management. Self-management support enables people to better manage their health condition on a day to day basis – it can take the form of referrals to third sector services, mentoring, peer support, access to publications, helplines, training and signposting. Examples of self-management activities include taking up exercise, improving diet, losing weight and using techniques to manage pain.

People with arthritis can play a pivotal role in managing their condition and stopping it from managing them. Despite this, many people with arthritis are not aware of the difference they can make in managing their condition and many people are not referred to services such as those provided by Arthritis Care.

Arthritis Care is calling on Assembly candidates to help Arthritis Care promote supported self-management for people with arthritis.



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