



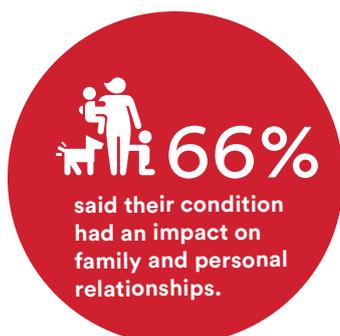
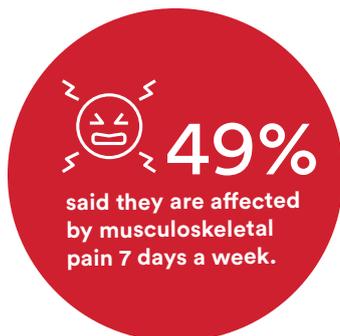
MUSCULOSKELETAL  
AUSTRALIA

# MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE.

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Australians share the impact  
of musculoskeletal  
conditions on their lives.

# Executive summary



As a national organisation, we see with clarity that the severity of musculoskeletal conditions and their impact on people's lives are poorly understood and often glossed over, trivialised or ignored.

## Underfunded and out of sight.

The level of funding provided to plan for and manage these conditions reflects this ignorance, with no dedicated funding provided by government between 2010 and 2018, and recent funding being fragmented and diffuse.

This is despite arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions being listed as one of 8 national health priorities since 2002.

## Making the invisible visible.

With 7 million Australians affected by these chronic, painful conditions, there is a clear mismatch between the community-wide, life-destroying scale of the problem and the resources devoted to mitigating them.

In our report *A Problem Worth Solving* (2013) we identified the economic impact of these conditions: something every government should be aware of. Now we've completed a survey designed to identify the impacts of these conditions on individuals, because it is they who pay the price for this underfunding.

Nationally, 3,453 people took part, providing never before seen insights into their lives.

## Insights from the survey: cause for alarm.

As the numbers highlighted on this page show, there is a level of pain and suffering in our community that is little known and largely ignored: family, friends, neighbours and colleagues struggling to maintain relationships and work, dealing with declining quality of life and finances, and unable to get effective, ongoing medical care and coordinated, meaningful support.

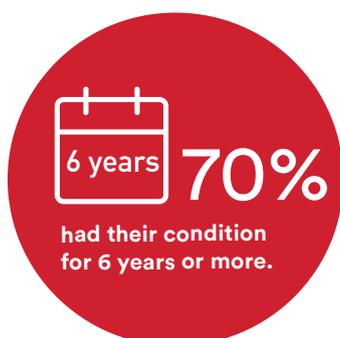
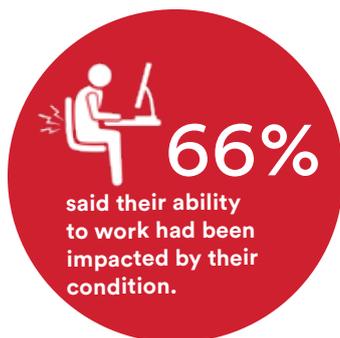
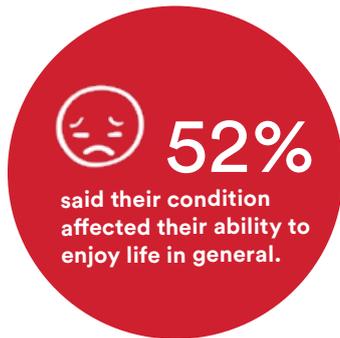
Alarming, the survey also revealed the prevalence of vicious cycles, with the lack of support and the unaffordability or unavailability of care leading to worsening symptoms, further reducing people's ability to be active or to work, leading in turn to declining health and finances in a spiral of despair. Indeed, a number of survey respondents expressed suicidal thoughts.

## A healthcare system not meeting people's needs.

Furthermore, the survey has revealed serious issues with the way government, the health care system and health care professionals deal with these complex conditions. Simply put, the system as it stands is not meeting people's needs, and countless people's lives are daily diminished by these systemic failures.

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# Executive summary (continued from previous page)



## Urgent action required.

Our organisation's mission is to support people for better musculoskeletal health. This survey has provided new insights into how we must do this, identifying essential changes which we are committed to driving.

These include:

- raising awareness of the prevalence and impact of these invisible conditions so that family, friends, colleagues, employers and health professionals change their attitudes and adapt their behaviours to provide compassion and more support.
- lobbying for change in the way chronic conditions like these are managed by the healthcare system and the medical profession.
- ensuring governments provide levels of funding and support proportionate to the prevalence and impact of these conditions across society.
- raising awareness of the vicious cycles experienced by many people with musculoskeletal conditions and promoting the value of helping people break out of them.
- unifying all of these elements around the notion of self-care: that chronic ongoing conditions like these demand that the person with the condition be at the heart of decision-making, and be encouraged and enabled to select and use the services most suited to helping them reduce the impact of these conditions on their lives.

Overall, this will require change across large areas of society. But the benefits will be widely felt.

## The shape of things to come.

For too long people with musculoskeletal conditions have suffered unduly. As a developed and compassionate nation, it is our duty to shape our systems to accommodate the needs of people with conditions that they have acquired through no fault of their own, all too often at an early age.

By making these invisible conditions visible, and by shaping the national response to their unique and chronic characteristics, we can reduce the burden they impose on people and increase their opportunities to lead happy, fulfilling and productive lives.

**This is a national emergency, and this report must be the trigger for change.**

**“** I am 28 and I have many chronic health conditions including autoimmune problems, rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and epilepsy. When I have flares of my RA, they are in my lungs and they cause me unbearable pain. I need to take steroids in response and until the flare has passed I am essentially bed bound... I am lucky that I am still working part-time, but the cost of my health care is always going to be difficult... not to mention the cost in time off work.

B.L.

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