



**Australian
Rheumatology
Association**



The Bone and Joint Decade
Promoting musculoskeletal health
Keep people moving

Arthritis
AUSTRALIA

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Musculoskeletal disorders second only to cancer as the leading cause of disease burden in Australasia

Influential global alliance calls on governments to task the World Health Organisation and the United Nations charter to prioritise musculoskeletal health following findings of Global Burden of Disease Study 2010

The Bone and Joint Decade (BJD), the only organisation that brings together ALL stakeholders considering ALL musculoskeletal conditions, calls for urgent action to “keep people moving” and reduce the burden of disability

Australia's health system must do more to address the growing burden of musculoskeletal conditions like lower back pain and osteoarthritis which are now second only to cancer as the leading cause of disease burden in Australasia, according to the findings of a pivotal international study released today.

The latest Global Burden of Diseases study which assesses burden consistently across diseases, highlights non-communicable diseases, particularly musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions, as an emerging global issue that must be addressed in the coming decade.

The study published and released in the prestigious medical journal The Lancet on December 13, 2012 was funded globally by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and was conducted by a consortium of international experts including the IHME, University of Washington Seattle, the School of Public Health, University of Queensland and the World Health Organisation.

A dedicated team led by Professor Lyn March, of the University of Sydney, have been working for the past four years to identify all the studies of arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions from around the world.

Professor March highlighted that the new study, which uses the most comprehensive methodology to date, provides definitive evidence that musculoskeletal (MSK) health should be given the same policy and resource priority as cancer, mental health and cardiovascular disease.

“The papers released in the Lancet today cover Global Mortality, Global Disability and a combined measure called the DALY – or disability adjusted life year. This measure allows all diseases to be directly compared and combines the impact of dying from a condition with the impact of living with the condition. The level of disability is a combination of the length of time people live with a condition as well as the level of severity of their condition and the impact it has on daily life through pain, psychological impact and loss of function, said Professor March, who led the international Musculoskeletal Expert Group for the study.”

“This study provides the clearest evidence to date of the huge and growing burden on the health of Australians from musculoskeletal conditions,” said Prof March.

“It shows that lower back pain is the leading cause of disability and osteoarthritis is one of the fastest growing conditions.” Australian data (which follows) was drawn from Australian health surveys.

“The Study shows that in Australasia, musculoskeletal conditions account for 15.3% of the total burden of death and disability, just behind cancer at 16.2% and ahead of heart disease (13.8%) and mental health and substance abuse (13%) These are all important health issues and recognised as national health priorities by the Australian government but to date MSK has not received an equitable level of priority.

“When the disability component alone is looked at, which reflects the pain and suffering of people living with the conditions and the enormous associated economic impact in productivity losses and need for health services – the MSK category is the leader at 27.4%, followed by all mental health and substance abuse at 22.4% - these two are the stand-outs with the others a long way behind,” Prof March said.

“We need clear and urgent action from our state and federal governments to improve prevention and management of musculoskeletal conditions to keep people moving and living without pain and disability, which is critical as our population ages,” Professor March said.

Ainslie Cahill, CEO Arthritis Australia, representing the voice of Australians living with arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions welcomes these data and echoes the call for urgent action: “Arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions are by far the leading causes of disability and chronic pain in Australia. The focus must be on preventing such debilitating effects. We want to see equitable access to effective treatments and professional support for all Australians struggling with arthritis no matter where they live,” said Ainslie Cahill.

Professor Anthony Woolf from the Royal Cornwall Hospital in England, Chair of the Bone and Joint Decade (BJD) International Co-ordinating Council, said: “In global terms, international and national policy has focused on infectious diseases, and more recently on non-communicable diseases with high mortality. Now it is time that priority was placed on preventing unnecessary pain and disability, which the BJD has been campaigning for over the past ten years.”

The Australian BJD national action network, an alliance of organisations and professional bodies caring for people with musculoskeletal conditions including the Australian Rheumatology Association, Arthritis Australia and the Australian Physiotherapy Association, has launched a call to action for our state and national governments to address the prevention and control of this growing burden of musculoskeletal conditions.

The MSK Expert Group, led by Professor Lyn March from the University of Sydney received funding from the Commonwealth Government Department of Health and Ageing and the Institute of Bone and Joint Research at Royal North Shore Hospital.

CALL TO ACTION

- **We call for explicit plans by state and commonwealth governments, health policy makers at regional level and the World Health Organisation to improve the musculoskeletal health of the population by:**
 - **preventing musculoskeletal disorders and injuries;**
 - **providing equitable access to cost-effective management of these conditions; and**
 - **prioritising research to close our gaps in knowledge.**
- **Musculoskeletal conditions include joint diseases such as osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis; back and neck pain; osteoporosis and fragility fractures; soft tissue rheumatism; injuries due to sports and in the workplace; and trauma commonly related to road traffic accidents**
- **They affect millions of people of all ages in all cultures in all countries**
- **They cause pain, physical disability and loss of personal and economic independence**
- **They are the second greatest cause of disability, as measured by years lived with disability (YLDs) worldwide and across most regions (*Lancet, Dec 13th 2012*)**
- **They have the fourth greatest impact on the health of the world population, considering both death and disability (*Lancet, Dec 13th 2012*)**
- **Yet, they are not prioritised in policies aimed at dealing with the growing burden of non-communicable diseases in all countries through ageing and changes in risk factors such as obesity, physical inactivity and injuries.**

For Australasia the figures are

AUSTRALASIA – AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND, SOUTH PACIFIC ISLANDS DALYS/YLDS

	summary statistic of all health death and disability	disability component alone
Cancer	16.2%	1.8%
CVD	13.8%	3.8%
Chronic resp	6.2%	7.6%
Neuro	6.0%	7.1%
MH & substance use	13.0%	22.4%
MSK	15.3%	27.4%
RA	0.7%	1.1%
OA	1.0%	1.8%
LBP	8.0%	14.6%
Neck pain	2.7%	4.9%
Gout	0.1%	0.1%
other MSK	2.9%	4.9%
other NCD	15.1%	17.7%
Injuries	9.8%	8.2%