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Tasmanians with arthritis deserve better. **The time has come to act.**

Arthritis & Osteoporosis Tasmania is calling for the next elected Tasmanian Government to act decisively and improve the level of awareness, education, treatment, and support services available to the one in four Tasmanians living with arthritis.

The organisation's 2024 Tasmanian Election Priorities Statement, released today (12 March), calls for a commitment to:

- Develop a statewide musculoskeletal model of care for Tasmania. Central to this will be the establishment of a statewide musculoskeletal triaging and assessment service, providing a single point of entry for public rheumatology referrals, assessment, and treatment pathways.
- Establish a specialist rheumatology and persistent pain service (1FTE rheumatologist, with multi-disciplinary support) based in Launceston to improve access to public health specialist services for those living in the north and northwest regions of Tasmania.
- Establish a statewide paediatric rheumatology service to facilitate early diagnosis and rapid access to effective care to prevent permanent disability and avoid current costly and disruptive travel interstate for specialist services.
- Support the development of purpose-built hydrotherapy pools to provide much needed community access to preventative health and rehabilitative warm water treatment programs.
- Provide an appropriate level of resourcing to Arthritis & Osteoporosis Tasmania to extend its evidence-based community education and self-management programs to the north and northwest regions.

Arthritis is one of the most common, costly and disabling of all chronic conditions.ⁱ In its many forms arthritis affects 1 in 4 Tasmanians, including children and young people.

By 2030, the number of Tasmanians with the most disabling types of arthritis, osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis is expected to significantly increase (20.5 per cent or 149,600 and the cost to the Tasmanian economy will increase by \$35 million to \$197.7 million).ⁱⁱ

CEO of Arthritis & Osteoporosis Tasmania Jackie Slyp said despite arthritis' overwhelming prevalence, its painful and debilitating impact and its national health priority status, there was a gaping mismatch between the burden of this disease and its prioritisation in policy and resourcing in Tasmania.

“It’s essential that the needs of people with arthritis are taken seriously by all elected members,” she said.

“Without purposeful action, elective surgery lists and outpatient clinic waiting times will continue to grow and the public health system will struggle to cope with the growing burden of disease resulting from arthritis.

“The investment required would be offset by the savings achieved through a reduction in elective surgery waiting lists due to less inappropriate referrals for surgery and better triage and management of people before surgery, as well as efficiencies through less duplication/triplication in administration and diagnostic testing.”

A full copy of the 2024 Tasmanian State Election Priorities Statement is available on the Arthritis & Osteoporosis Tasmania website <https://arthritistas.org.au/news/media-releases/>

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References:

- ⁱ Arthritis Australia for the Australian Government Department of Health, 2019. *The National Strategic Action Plan for Arthritis*.
- ⁱⁱ Arthritis Australia, 2016. *Counting the Cost: Part 1 Healthcare Costs*.