

31 October 2014

The Hon Mal Brough MP
Chair, Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Brough

As a member of the Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme, I am pleased to present to you a summary of new research from the University of New South Wales on arthritis and disability.

The aim of this research, involving over 800 people nationwide, was to increase our understanding of the impact of arthritis on people's lives and how we can better support them to participate fully in social and economic life. The full report is available at www.arthritisaustralia.com.au

We already know that arthritis is a leading cause of disability and early retirement in Australia. More than 600,000 people experience arthritis-related disability and more than 80,000 people aged 45-64 years can't work because of their arthritis at an estimated loss to GDP of \$9.4 billion a year. Disability Support Pension payments for people with arthritis are around \$1.3 billion a year.

The research has highlighted the need to improve access to formal support services for people with arthritis-related disability to support social and economic participation. It has also underscored the importance of improving care for people with arthritis earlier in the disease course, when much can be done to prevent or reduce the disability caused by the condition. Key findings include:

- **Daily activities are a struggle.** One in three people with arthritis can't manage their home or garden, one in five can't do domestic chores and 5% need help with basic personal care.
- **Work capacity is significantly reduced.** Two in three people reported that they had to reduce their hours of work or change the type of work they did because of their arthritis: one in four were permanently unable to work due to their condition.
- **Financial hardship is common.** One in five people reported that they struggled to meet daily expenses due to the reduced income and increased costs of living with arthritis.
- **Carers are also affected** physically, emotionally and financially, with most people with arthritis relying heavily on informal support from family and friends.
- **Access to formal disability support is ad hoc and limited,** especially for younger people. Many reported that the disability impact of arthritis is poorly recognised by disability services.

More than half of the growth in the labour force in the next decade will be workers aged 45-64 years, so it is essential that common barriers to workforce participation in this age group, such as poor health and disability, are addressed if significant gains in productivity are to be achieved.

Our recently launched *Time to Move: Arthritis* strategy will help deliver better care and support for people with arthritis, significantly reducing associated disability. We seek your support for its implementation.

If you would like further information on the *Arthritis and Disability* report or on the *Time to Move* strategy, please contact Franca Marine on

In addition, we would be delighted if you would consider joining our bipartisan Parliamentary Friends of Arthritis which is co-sponsored by the Hon Kevin Andrews, Senator Carol Brown, Senator Rachel Siewert and Mr Nick Champion. This would allow us to provide you with regular - but not excessive - updates on the social and economic impacts of arthritis and how these can be addressed. If you would like to join, please let Franca know.

I know you lead an extremely busy life and that your time is precious but we would really value your interest in a condition that greatly impacts so many Australians and their families.

Yours sincerely

Ainslie Cahill
Chief Executive Officer