

PEOPLE. PAIN. PRIORITIES.

**PUSHING BACK AGAINST ARTHRITIS IN
WALES**

**MANIFESTO
2021
CYMRU
VERSUS
ARTHRITIS**

NOW MORE THAN EVER, WE NEED YOUR HELP TO PUSH BACK AGAINST THE PAIN OF ARTHRITIS.

The pandemic has been especially challenging for many of the **887,000 people** in Wales who live with arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions. Many have been shielding. Many have had life-changing treatments and services postponed and now face a much longer wait in severe pain.

This manifesto identifies what Wales must do in the next four years to reduce the impact of arthritis – not only its impact on individuals and their families, but also on our economy and our health and social care services.

Musculoskeletal conditions are often 'hidden' conditions, yet they are among the biggest causes of persistent pain, disability and working days lost in Wales.

Our message is clear – arthritis can devastate lives, but with your help we can push back against the pain of arthritis. Together, we can make a real difference to the lives of many thousands of people in our communities.

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CYMRU VERSUS ARTHRITIS IS CALLING FOR:

1. A new **National Orthopaedic Recovery and Transformation Plan** to rebuild and protect Wales' orthopaedic services, reduce the backlog and waiting times and create a high-quality service fit for the future.
2. The appointment of a **Musculoskeletal National Clinical Lead for Wales** to support the implementation of the **National Arthritis and Long-Term Musculoskeletal Conditions Framework** – to strengthen prevention, early intervention, self-management and patient access to the right services at the right time.
3. **Safeguarding good musculoskeletal health as more people work from home** and promoting measures and schemes that can **support people with arthritis to be in or stay in work.**
4. Senedd candidates to understand the impact of arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions, recognise these conditions as a healthcare priority in Wales and be champions for people living with arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions in their constituencies and regions.

POLICY CALL ONE

Develop a *National Orthopaedic Recovery and Transformation Plan* to rebuild and protect Wales' orthopaedic services, reduce the backlog and waiting times and create a high-quality service fit for the future.

Elective orthopaedic services have been particularly hard-hit during the COVID-19 pandemic. Waiting times for surgery have grown significantly,ⁱ and many thousands of people are now waiting much longer in severe – and increasing – levels of pain. The consequences of such day-in, day-out pain can be devastating. People face severe impacts to their independence, mobility, ability to work and mental health.

In a recent Versus Arthritis survey of people shielding during the pandemic, 45% said that their pain had got worse through lockdown and 59% said that their operations had been cancelled.ⁱⁱ

Operations like knee and hip replacements can be transformational.ⁱⁱⁱ They can replace excruciating pain with restored mobility and independence. However, delays to surgery can impact physical and mental health, and can even lessen the positive impact of surgery itself.^{iv}

We need elective orthopaedic capacity to be restored safely as soon as possible and for that capacity to be protected from other pressures on healthcare services.

The challenge facing orthopaedic services in Wales is significant. Joint replacement services have been under huge pressure for many years. We want to see Wales rebuild a better and stronger orthopaedic service that is fit for the future.

We are calling for a national, co-produced strategic plan that will bring together expertise from across our Health Boards, health professionals, third sector and people who access services. Informed by established standards and best practice – as well as a detailed capacity/demand analysis – the National Orthopaedic Recovery and Transformation Plan must rebuild orthopaedic services to deliver better health outcomes and create a service that Wales deserves.

CYMRU VERSUS ARTHRITIS IS CALLING FOR:

- A new National Orthopaedic Recovery and Transformation Plan that will:
 - restore capacity and activity levels in elective orthopaedic services
 - reduce the backlog of procedures and bring down waiting times
 - review capacity/demand for orthopaedic in Wales
 - provide support for people who are waiting longer for surgery
 - build back stronger – take a strategic approach to designing a high-quality service fit for the future, for the whole of Wales.

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POLICY CALL TWO

Implement the new National Arthritis and Long-Term Musculoskeletal Conditions Framework, supported by a new Musculoskeletal National Clinical Lead for Wales – to strengthen prevention, early intervention and self-management, and to provide access to the right services at the right time.

Following a campaign led by Cymru Versus Arthritis that gained much support across the parties, the Welsh Government worked with key stakeholders to develop a new national framework to improve arthritis and musculoskeletal health services across Wales.

Understandably, that policy work was paused during the pandemic. The framework has been developed to an advanced stage, and we will call on the Welsh Government to complete this work and begin implementation by the end of 2021.

People with arthritis and related conditions may access a range of healthcare services at different stages of their journey. These include primary care, rheumatology, pain management, orthopaedics, rehabilitation and many others. Accessing the right service at the right time is key. The framework outlines best practice and builds a pathway to help people gain timely access to the most appropriate healthcare services, treatments, support and information.

The framework promotes prevention and early intervention to help people overcome barriers to increased physical activity and to reach and maintain a healthy body weight. It also promotes early access to diagnosis, treatments and interventions. It emphasises the importance of supported self-management to help people understand their condition and learn practical skills and strategies to manage their condition. The framework aims to maximise independence and empower and support people to live well in their community.

The framework also offers the opportunity to further develop Wales' new Paediatric Rheumatology Service. The new multidisciplinary service was established at the Noah's Ark Children's Hospital for Wales in 2020 to support children living with arthritis.

Cymru Versus Arthritis is calling for the establishment of a new Musculoskeletal National Clinical Lead role, similar to roles that exist in other specialisms, to help complete and implement the framework.

CYMRU VERSUS ARTHRITIS IS CALLING FOR:

- Delivery of the new National Arthritis and Long-Term Musculoskeletal Conditions Framework, supported by a new Musculoskeletal National Clinical Lead, to:
 - strengthen prevention and self-management provisions and support people to overcome barriers to increasing their physical activity levels
 - ensure that people with arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions can access the right services, treatment, support and information at the right time
 - improve musculoskeletal health and healthcare services across Wales
 - build on the support available to children living with arthritis in Wales via the new multidisciplinary Paediatric Rheumatology service.

POLICY CALL THREE

Safeguard good musculoskeletal health as more people work from home and promote measures and schemes that can support people with arthritis to be in or stay in work.

The pain of living with a musculoskeletal condition has a significant impact on many people's ability to remain in work. The longer people are absent from work, the higher the chances are of their permanently leaving the workforce.

Around 63% of working-age adults with a musculoskeletal condition are in work compared to around 82% of people with no health conditions.^v Musculoskeletal conditions are also a leading cause of sickness absence. However, many people with these conditions want to work and can thrive in work with the right support.

Additional support – such as practical equipment or transport provision provided through the Access to Work scheme – can support people with arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions to remain in or to return to work.^{vi}

However, musculoskeletal conditions can be very unpredictable, and symptom severity can fluctuate significantly from day to day or even within the working day. Flexible working, including working from home or being able to alter working hours, can therefore be particularly beneficial to many people with arthritis. For some, that flexibility can make the difference between employment and not being in work, thus reducing the disability employment gap.

The pandemic has changed the world of work for many people, including those who moved rapidly to working from home. Cymru Versus Arthritis would like to see the right to flexible working become a default unless employers have a strong reason not to enable this.

However, it is vital that working from home is planned and supported in order to reduce the risks to musculoskeletal health posed by using inadequate equipment. A recent Institute for Employment Studies study found that there has been a significant increase in musculoskeletal complaints among home workers,^{vii} and a Cymru Versus Arthritis survey found that 84% of respondents in Wales who had desk-based jobs and who switched to working from home during the pandemic have since experienced joint, muscle or bone pain.^{viii} Employers and employees need guidance to avoid this outcome.

CYMRU VERSUS ARTHRITIS IS CALLING FOR:

- increased promotion of support services available to people with arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions to return to or remain in work, such as the Access to Work scheme.
- guidance for employers to support people with musculoskeletal conditions to be able to work flexibly and remotely where possible.
- action to increase awareness of employers' duties to enable staff to work safely and to promote good working practices, which extend to staff working remotely.

POLICY CALL FOUR

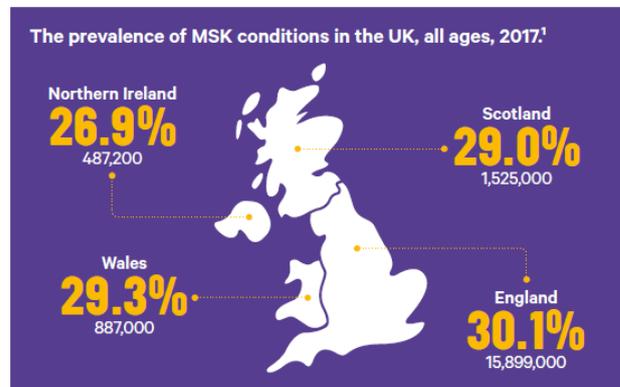
As a Senedd candidate, understand the impact of arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions, recognise them as a healthcare priority in Wales and be a champion for people living with these conditions in your constituency or region.

Arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions have a huge impact in Wales, both in terms of individuals and their families and in terms of the wider economy and health and social care sectors. Arthritis can strike at any age, including during childhood. It devastates lives, and just accepting arthritis and persistent pain is unacceptable.

You can be a champion for people with arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions in your constituency by listening to their experiences, working alongside Cymru Versus Arthritis, acting to improve services and learning more about the impact of arthritis.

Arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions are often 'invisible' because pain is hidden. However, these numbers highlight the impact of arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions in our communities:

- Musculoskeletal conditions are the most common longstanding health conditions in Wales,^{ix} affecting 887,000 people – almost one third of our population.^x
- Treating the two most common forms of arthritis, osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis, is estimated to have cost the UK economy £10.2 billion in direct costs to the NHS and wider healthcare system in 2017.^{xi}



- More than 90% of elective knee and hip replacements are due to osteoarthritis.^{xii}
- Musculoskeletal problems are the second most common reason for sickness absence in the UK after minor illnesses (such as colds), accounting for 27.8 million days.^{xiii}
- Depression is four times more common among people who have persistent pain compared to those without pain.^{xiv}
- 78% of people with arthritis surveyed say they experience pain most days.^{xv}

CYMRU VERSUS ARTHRITIS IS CALLING ON CANDIDATES TO:

- Be champions for people with arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions in your constituency and region:
 - Push for arthritis health care services to be appropriately prioritised in your area.
 - Meet with Cymru Versus Arthritis after the election to find out how you can support our policy calls.
 - Support people with arthritis in your area by signposting them to Cymru Versus Arthritis services (helpline: 0800 5200 520).

Cymru Versus Arthritis commits to helping you to reduce the impact of the pain of arthritis in your constituency.

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ABOUT CYMRU VERSUS ARTHRITIS

We at Versus Arthritis are the UK's largest charity focused on defying arthritis. We provide award-winning publications, self-management support, peer and virtual support, online communities and virtual assistants that answer questions about arthritis and COVID-19. We also fund research into breakthrough treatments that improve the lives of people with arthritis and related conditions.

Cymru Versus Arthritis has embarked on an ambitious plan to expand our peer support offering across Wales. We offer a helpline that signposts people to our services: 0800 5200 520. Our helpline is open Monday to Friday, 9:00 am to 8:00 pm, to provide practical, tailored support and information to people with arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions to help them manage their condition.

You can learn more at our website: www.versusarthritis.org

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Versus Arthritis: Registered Charity England and Wales No. 207711, Scotland No. SC041156.
Document: 'FINAL CVA Manifesto-r0.2 [Eng]' 23 Rhagfyr 2020

ⁱ At the end of September 2020, the total number of people waiting for trauma and orthopaedic treatment was 75,131, compared with 64,145 at the end of September 2019. The percentage of people waiting fewer than 26 weeks was 23.6% in 2020 compared with 74.2% the same time in the previous year. Therefore, more than 70% of people are waiting more than 26 weeks, with 55% waiting more than 36 weeks. Considering current (December 2020) orthopaedic capacity levels, Cymru Versus Arthritis expects waiting times for elective orthopaedic services such as knee and hip replacements to continue to increase well into 2021.

Stats Wales. (2020) Patient pathways waiting to start treatment by month, grouped weeks and treatment function. Available from: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/NHS-Hospital-Waiting-Times/Referral-to-Treatment/patientpathwayswaitingtostarttreatment-by-month-groupedweeks-treatmentfunction>

ⁱⁱ Versus Arthritis. (2020) Shielding survey, conducted in July 2020 among 1,003 UK respondents, nationally representative (with nation boosts). Unpublished.

ⁱⁱⁱ Räsänen, P. et al. (2007) Effectiveness of hip or knee replacement surgery in terms of quality-adjusted life years and costs. Available from: doi: 10.1080/17453670610013501.

^{iv} Academic evidence demonstrates the health impact of delayed access to joint replacement surgery beyond six months. Evidence highlights the long-term benefits of joint replacement surgery on people's mobility and ability to do everyday activities. Patients who had extended waiting times had increased pain and disability compared to those with shorter waits.

Burns, H. (2018) Scottish Government independent review into waiting times targets. Available from: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/review-targets-indicators-health-social-care-scotland/>

^v Versus Arthritis. (2019) The State of MSK Health 2019. Versus Arthritis. Available from: www.versusarthritis.org/media/14594/state-of-musculoskeletal-health-2019.pdf.

^{vi} UK.gov. Get support in work if you have a disability or health condition (Access to Work). Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>.

^{vii} Bevan, S. et al. (2020) IES working at home wellbeing survey. Available from: www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/ies-working-home-wellbeing-survey.

^{viii} Survey of a UK-wide representative sample of 1,040 workers in the UK who have worked from home over lockdown – excludes those who are self-employed or who normally work from home. Poll conducted between 25th August – 1st September 2020, by Opinium.

^{ix} Gov.Wales. (2019) The National Survey for Wales 2019. Available from: <https://gov.wales/national-survey-wales>.

^x Versus Arthritis. (2019) The State of MSK Health 2019. Versus Arthritis. Available from: www.versusarthritis.org/media/14594/state-of-musculoskeletal-health-2019.pdf.

^{xi} York Health Economics (2017). The Cost of Arthritis: Calculation conducted on behalf of Arthritis Research UK (unpublished).

^{xii} National Joint Registry. (2020) 17th Annual Report 2020. Available from: <https://reports.njrcentre.org.uk/Portals/0/PDFdownloads/NJR%2017th%20Annual%20Report%202020.pdf>.

^{xiii} Office for National Statistics (ONS). Sickness absence in the UK labour market: 2018. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-health-and-work/health-matters-health-and-work>

^{xiv} Lépine, J., Briley, M. (2004) The epidemiology of pain in depression. Available from: doi: 10.1002/hup.618.

^{xv} Revealing Reality (ESRO). (2015) Living well with arthritis: identifying the unmet needs of people with arthritis. Unpublished.