

UNSEEN. UNHEARD. UNEQUAL.

A manifesto for arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions



NORTHERN IRELAND

VERSUS
ARTHRITIS



Pushing back against the pain of arthritis in Northern Ireland

There are over 500,000 people living with arthritis and related musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions in Northern Ireland, around a quarter of the population. MSK conditions are the single biggest cause of physical disability in Northern Ireland.

The pain of these conditions affects all aspects of life – the ability to work, care for a family, to move free from pain and to live independently. Yet, arthritis is often dismissed as an inevitable part of aging or shrugged off as ‘just a bit of arthritis’.

This must change.

It is estimated that 1 in 5 people in Northern Ireland live with pain every single day and arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions are the biggest causes of that pain.

Unseen, Unheard, Unequal.

A recent report into chronic pain found that 4 in 10 people with musculoskeletal pain report the highest impact pain.

The pandemic has exacerbated an already dire situation for people who live with arthritis and MSK conditions. In Northern Ireland people already had the worst health service waiting times by far in the UK. Many have been shielding. Many have had life-changing treatments and services postponed and are now facing waits of six years in unbearable pain for surgery and treatment.

This is not acceptable.

Now more than ever, we need your support to improve thousands of lives in Northern Ireland by pushing back against the pain of arthritis.

This manifesto sets out the key practical actions that will transform the lives of your constituents.



Northern Ireland Versus Arthritis is calling for:

1 Better support for people with arthritis by:

- recognition of MSK conditions as a healthcare priority
- better diagnosis and treatment of MSK of conditions within primary care
- developing standardised pain pathways and an MSK strategy
- better communication with and re-assessment of patients on waiting lists.

2 Timely access to joint-replacement surgery for people who need it through:

- full and swift implementation of the Elective Care Framework
- urgent action on waiting times for lifechanging elective surgery
- prioritising ‘routine’ elective surgery.

3 More investment in support for self-management so that people with arthritis can manage their condition and:

- a strategic approach and easier access to self-management and pain management support
- routinely offering a support package to people on a waiting list, to help people wait well and stay fit for surgery or treatment
- providing timely access to other treatments such as podiatry and physiotherapy
- public health messaging on the importance of physical activity
- health trusts to work with Versus Arthritis to develop a support package.

4 Action to address the impact of arthritis on people’s ability to work with:

- better signposting to in-work support schemes
- action by, and support for, employers to recruit and retain people with MSK conditions
- signposting to benefits and financial advice for those unable to work.

WHY IT MATTERS ARTHRITIS IN NUMBERS

Musculoskeletal conditions affect **525,000 people** - around a quarter of the population - in Northern Ireland.

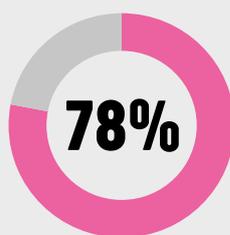


More than **90%** of elective **knee and hip**



replacements are due to osteoarthritis.

Musculoskeletal problems are the second most common reason for sickness absence in the UK accounting for **27.8 million days**.



78% of people with arthritis surveyed say they experience pain most days.

People with arthritis waiting for surgery last year spent an average of **£1739** to manage their pain.



Depression is **four times more common** among people who have persistent pain.

About Versus Arthritis

Arthritis is a hidden condition that makes people feel unseen, unheard and unequal. The scale and impact is huge as the condition intrudes on everyday life – affecting the ability to work, care for a family, to move free from pain and to live independently. Yet arthritis is often dismissed as an inevitable part of aging or shrugged off as ‘just a bit of arthritis’. We don’t think that this is OK. Alongside volunteers, healthcare professionals, decision makers and researchers we do everything we can to push back against arthritis.

Our range of support includes:

- face to face local and virtual pain management and activity programmes
- a network of local peer support groups
- a website www.versusarthritis.org/get-help/ with information and advice on MSK issues, and exercises to manage your pain
- a free helpline on 0800 5200 520 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm)
- a supportive online community and social media presence.

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Versus Arthritis: Registered Charity England and Wales No. 207711,
Scotland No. SC041156.

For a more detailed report go to:
www.versusarthritis.org/nimanifesto

