Impact Report

2025/2026

Arthritis UK

Introduction

At Arthritis UK, we're committed to creating lasting change for people living with arthritis.

This report reflects the impact we've had over the past year, and the collective effort of our incredible community who are helping us work towards achieving our mission:

We won't rest until everyone with arthritis has access to the treatments and support they need to live the life they choose with real hope of a cure in the future.

To deliver our mission we invest in world-class research, deliver high-quality services and campaign on the issues that matter most to people with arthritis.

As you read through this report, we invite you to reflect on the progress we've made together – and the opportunities that still lie ahead. We'll continue to learn from and develop our work to make sure that everyone living with arthritis can access the support and information they need.

Thank you

Thank you to everyone who has made this report possible, including:

- Everyone who took part in our surveys.
- Our incredible community of supporters, volunteers, campaigners, fundraisers, partners and researchers, who stand with us every day.
- The inspiring people with arthritis who graciously share stories of their lived experience.
- The dedicated health and care professionals who attend our training, champion our services, and help us reach more people.
- Our committed network of researchers whose work continues to push the boundaries of what's possible.
- The generous individuals and organisations who help to fund our work.
- Our brilliant internal teams whose passion and expertise drive our work forward.
- And all who share our vision of a future free from arthritis.

Our year in numbers

76,043
acts of support delivered for people with arthritis.

17,588
Helpline enquiries answered.

93%
of service users are satisfied with the information they received from Arthritis UK.[1]

78%
of our young people felt more positive about the future living with arthritis after attending one of our events.[2]

3,633
health and care professionals and students accessed our face-to-face or online training and support sessions.

109,883
healthcare and workplace professionals accessed our self-learning resources.

1.2m+
information booklets delivered or downloaded.

47,114
campaign actions taken.

150
applicants funded across 27 research awards.

44
researchers helped with PPI (patient and public involvement) and 22 researchers/organisations connected with research partners to deliver PPI activities.

[1] 834 out of 897 survey respondents
[2] 83 out of 107 survey respondents

Support Services

Our Support Services provide information and advice on all aspects of living with arthritis. They consist of four main areas – our Helpline, Arthritis Connect (online), health information resources, and the 'My Arthritis' app.

Helpline

We offer access to a free, confidential helpline staffed by trained advisors who understand the realities of living with arthritis. They offer guidance on symptoms, treatments, pain management, support at work, emotional wellbeing, and navigating health services. The team also signposts people to further support, including local services and online resources, making sure no one has to manage arthritis alone.

Arthritis Connect (our online community)

Our moderated online community, now known as Arthritis Connect, provides a safe, welcoming space where people can connect with others who understand what it's like to live with arthritis. Members can share experiences, ask questions, offer encouragement and build supportive relationships – helping to reduce isolation and create a sense of belonging.

> **Received a lovely response, made me feel I mattered**
>
> Helpline user (email), woman aged 70 to 74 in Scotland, March 2026

AVA

Our arthritis virtual assistant chatbot AVA is available 24/7 and provides clear, accessible information about arthritis and practical ways to manage symptoms. Recently refreshed with a new look and improved navigation, AVA now makes it easier to find trusted guidance and information, including exercise videos tailored to different joints and times of day, approaches to managing pain through both medicine and self-management, and dedicated support for young people living with arthritis. It also signposts users to our wider services.

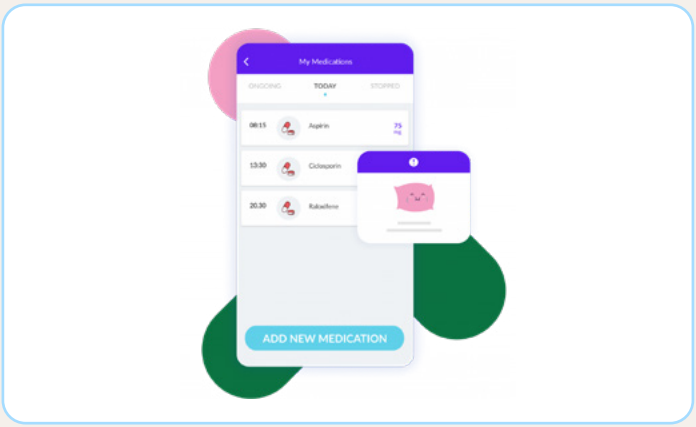
17,588
Helpline enquiries answered.

6,214
Arthritis Connect members, with over 800 active members each month.

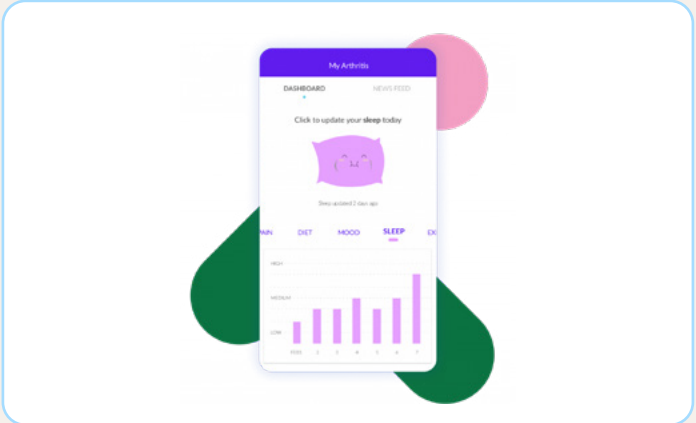
6,398
AVA users.

‘My Arthritis’ app

The ‘My Arthritis’ symptom-tracking app helps people with arthritis to monitor pain, fatigue, reduced mobility, and other symptoms over time. Users can spot patterns, understand triggers, and generate summaries to support conversations with health and care professionals. It’s a practical digital tool that encourages self-management and helps people feel more in control of their condition.



3,387
App users



Health information resources

Our booklets, guides and digital materials cover everything from specific conditions and treatments to exercise, self-management and daily living. These resources are written in clear, accessible language and are regularly reviewed by clinical experts, empowering people to make informed decisions about their health. We achieved PIF accreditation in 2025 for our health information resources, meaning they are a trusted, evidence-based source of health information.

> **I feel that you really care and understand the difficulties of living with arthritis. Thank you so much for all the useful information.**
>
> Helpline user (telephone), woman aged 75 to 79 in England, February 2026

> **It is always excellent for advice and help and you feel like you have done the right thing getting in touch.**
>
> (AVA chatbot user, woman aged 55 to 59 in Wales, March 2026)

1,287,431
booklets downloaded or distributed.

3,000+
health and care professionals across the UK have ordered booklets from us in the past year.

88%
of service users would recommend our Support Services to others.[3]

79%
of people said they were more aware of where to get support for their condition following an interaction with one of our Support Services.[4]

74%
said that using our Support Services improved their understanding of arthritis.[5]

58%
of our support service users feel more able to reduce the impact that arthritis has on their lives.[6]

[3] 437 out of 497 respondents would recommend
[4] 440 out of 557 respondents agree or strongly agree
[5] 410 out of 554 respondents agree or strongly agree
[6] 316 out of 546 respondents agree or strongly agree

Keira's story:

a little app making an enormous difference

I started having pain in my feet when I was in my teens. Pain that was so bad, I begged for help at my GP's clinic.

Eventually, I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and began treatment. But the pain kept spreading. It was only after relocating to Wales and switching rheumatologists that I found a treatment combination that offered some relief. But still, no one explained to me officially how to manage my condition.

My own research brought me to Arthritis UK. I joined a Zoom call in lockdown because I wanted advice about managing arthritis as a parent of young children. Then, two years ago, I went to an Arthritis UK information session and was introduced to the My Arthritis App which has been a game changer.

I mainly use the app to record anything that could have triggered a flare. It also helps me to feedback to my consultant as I only have one five-minute review every year. So it's important to be able to give accurate and detailed information (which was difficult before). The app has been incredibly valuable in assisting my self-monitoring. I only wish I'd been told about it 10 years ago!

Keira Brooks (Powys, Wales)
lives with rheumatoid arthritis

Self-management services

Our work brings together practical information sessions, accessible physical activity programmes and structured self-management courses.

These support people to build confidence and develop practical skills, and to take an active role in managing their condition and improving their overall wellbeing.

Our online offer pulls together all our existing services in one easy to access place, ensuring that wherever a person lives, they will be able to access the support they need to manage their condition, while also connecting with other people with similar conditions.

15,617
people attended, 2,434 sessions.

Information sessions

Our information sessions give people practical knowledge they can use every day. Covering topics like managing fatigue and pain, each session is designed to be relaxed, accessible and genuinely useful. The aim is to help people feel more informed and more confident in managing their condition.

Physical activity sessions

Staying active can be challenging when you're living with pain, but gentle movement often brings real benefits. Our classes are designed to help people stay mobile in a safe and supportive way.

These sessions can:
- Reduce everyday pain and stiffness.
- Strengthen muscles and support joint health.
- Lift energy levels and improve mood.
- Enhance balance and contribute to healthy weight management.

Whether someone is taking their first steps toward being more active or looking for ways to maintain their routine, we help them find an approach that feels manageable and sustainable.

Self-management courses

Our five-week supported self-management courses give people the space, tools and confidence to take charge of their health. The sessions focus on simple, practical techniques that can ease stress, improve sleep and help people feel more in control.

What makes these courses special is our volunteers who also live with long-term conditions, so they understand the challenges and share the strategies they use in their own lives.

Participants benefit from a blend of evidence-based strategies to manage fatigue, pain and stress, along with practical advice that supports better sleep and restorative rest. They also receive structured support to set goals and adapt to change, alongside clear guidance on nutrition and physical activity. All of this takes place within a small, supportive group environment where people can learn from one another and feel understood.

> **[As a result of attending the session] I'm going to make some changes with my diet, start reflexology sessions to help with my anxiety and ensure I do mindfulness and Chi Me regularly.**
>
> Online information session attendee, woman aged 60 to 64 in England, March 2026

92%

of self-management service users would recommend our support to others.[7]

80%

said that attending a self-management course improved their understanding of arthritis.[8]

79%

of self-management service attendees feel more able to reduce the impact that arthritis has on their lives.[9]

87%

of attendees said they were more aware of where to get support for their condition following one of our information sessions.[10]

71%

said that using one of our self-management courses helped build their confidence when talking about their condition to friends, family, and health and care professionals.[11]

[7] 1035 out of 1125 respondents
[8] 868 out of 1085 respondents agree or strongly agree
[9] 658 out of 833 respondents agree or strongly agree
[10] 771 out of 887 respondents agree or strongly agree
[11] 557 out of 779 respondents (71.5%) have increased confidence talking to health and care professionals, 553 out of 779 respondents (71.0%) have increased confidence talking to friends and family members

Kathy's story:

from receiving help to helping others

It's terrifying the way pain can take over your life. How it can shrink your world beyond recognition. Compress it down to the four walls of your house. But for the longest time, that was my reality. A life defined by my arthritis and the pain it caused.

I was on so many painkillers back then… strong ones, too. And while they helped to make my days a little easier, I couldn't shake the feeling that I was just existing rather than actually living. I wanted more from life.

For a while, I couldn't imagine things changing. But then a doctor connected me with a community link worker who in turn introduced me to Maggie at Arthritis UK. Maggie invited me to an Arthritis UK support group in Helensburgh that she was running. A five-week course that she said may help me manage my symptoms better.

But pain had kept me prisoner for such a long time that I was apprehensive. Especially because I assumed I'd just be sitting around for hours, listening to people talk about arthritis and telling me things I already knew. But how wrong was I? Joining that support group was the best thing I did.

The first week, I just listened. I was so afraid that if I spoke, I would burst into tears. But during my second meeting, I started to talk. I got a little bit upset, but that didn't matter because so did everyone else. I mean, we were all going through the same thing. And for the first time in a long time, I felt heard.

During those first five weeks, the group taught me that my life could still be full, active and meaningful. I went from someone forever on the sidelines to someone who could see life stretching out in front of her again. And I made friendships that last to this day.

That said, while I felt less isolated, I was still in a lot of pain. I remember one day listening to a talk on mental health and how you can shut yourself off. It was like I was listening to a story about myself! That was a lightbulb moment. I wanted to be the mum I ached to be again. To show my grandson that you can overcome anything.

"That was a lightbulb moment. I wanted to be the mum I ached to be again. To show my grandson that you can overcome anything.

After speaking with my doctor, I carefully came off my pain medication. Which sounds simple, but it was going to the group that gave me the confidence to approach the conversation. The pain was still there, but it had always been in the background anyway. Slowly, I started to feel better within myself. More of a grandparent. I wanted to see my friends again too, which was a good sign. And I found I was also able to move more, because I wasn't as tired.

Following the initial course, I became involved in sessions about hand osteoarthritis. One opportunity led to another and as my confidence grew I found myself doing things I once thought were impossible. Like speaking publicly and proudly about my condition. And signposting other people to Arthritis UK. I had gone from the one receiving support to volunteering for Arthritis UK and helping others who were following a path similar to the one I'd been on.

"I found myself doing things I once thought were impossible. Like speaking publicly and proudly about my condition.

My confidence wasn't the only thing that grew though. My love of movement did, too. When I first joined the group, I was in so much pain that I took taxis all the time. But today, I walk everywhere. And three times a week I'm out running. In April, I did a 24-mile kilt walk. And in September I'm going to do the Great North Run!

It's not easy, of course. After all, I do still have arthritis. But what I've learned is that it doesn't matter if I have to walk a bit. It's not about speed. It's about the fact that I can get from the start to the finish. Because with arthritis, that alone is amazing. And that's what I'm trying to show the people who I support…that anything's possible!

Today, things look a lot different than they did a few years ago. Sure, every morning I get up and the pain is there. But I won't let it control my life anymore. I'm in charge of my life. Not my arthritis.

And that's why I volunteer with Arthritis UK. Because by showing others what I can achieve in spite of my arthritis, I want to give others hope that their diagnosis doesn't mark the end of their story. Just a new chapter.

Young People and Families Service

Our Young People and Families Service supports children and young people (under the age of 25) living with arthritis and related rheumatic conditions, alongside their families.

The service provides one-to-one support, opportunities to connect with others, and trusted information to help young people and families adjust to diagnosis, manage daily life, and navigate transitions such as moving into adult care. It aims to reduce isolation, build confidence and support families with healthcare and life challenges, while creating opportunities to shape research, raise awareness and campaign for change.

One-to-one support and information

Our staff provide personalised support for young people and parents, including help with symptoms, emotional wellbeing, education or employment, and understanding healthcare pathways. We also offer practical resources for families and education settings.

Events and activities

We run in-person events, residentials, and online sessions that bring young people together to meet others who understand their experiences. Supported by peer volunteers, these activities help young people build confidence, skills and connections.

Community and change

We create opportunities for young people and families to be part of a community that 'gets it' and is driving change. This includes peer support for parents, online communities for young adults, volunteering opportunities, and ways to raise awareness and support others.

Youth and family voice

Our Young People's Panel and Your Rheum network ensure young people have a strong voice in shaping services, campaigns and research. Young people and families are also supported to campaign for change and to be heard by decision makers and healthcare professionals.

> **It is an amazing, accommodating place and they try to help you as much as possible, and all the events are fun and entertaining.**
>
> Residential attendee, young person aged 13 or over in Scotland, October 2025

> **I'm always grateful to speak with [YPFS worker], she's very kind and caring and her level of empathy is incredible. She's very approachable and her manner with the kids is lovely.**
>
> Parent of a child with arthritis aged under 13, 1-2-1 session, August 2025

3,395

Number of times we provided support through our 1-2-1 work and family events.

120

YPFS events and youth voice activities took place.

77%

of our young people say that it is important to them to meet other young people with arthritis in person.

95%

of our young attendees and/or their parents would recommend our activities, workshops and residential events to others.[12]

78%

of our young people say that they feel positive about the future living with arthritis after attending one of our events or residential weekends.[13]

59%

of our young attendees feel more confident in being themselves after attending one of our events or residential weekends.[14]

[12] Based on 212 out of 224 respondents who rated our services 8+ out of 10
[13] Based on 83 out of 107 respondents who answered 'sometimes' or 'all the time'
[14] Based on 63 out of 107 respondents who answered with a score of 8+ out of 10

This event helped me to gain friendship with people with similar conditions and relate to each other… It's a great way to meet new people and spend your whole time here showing your creativity beyond your limits. Sometimes I can be lonely especially with a rheumatic condition like this so it's good to have people to relate to and talk to.

Residential attendee, young person aged 13 or over, October 2025

Lyla's story:
baking for arthritis

Lyla from Northern Ireland was diagnosed with juvenile idiopathic arthritis on Christmas Eve, 2024, when she was 11 years old. At the time, she couldn't move her right hand, which meant no playing the clarinet or piano or taking part in PE at school. She couldn't even write.

It took a while to get her treatment right, but she eventually got some movement back and in 2026 took part in Channel 4's **Junior Bake Off**. Following the show, Lyla decided to write her own recipe book with all proceeds going to Arthritis UK.

The recipe book is an opportunity to pour back into Arthritis UK who have been such a support to us.

Lyla's mum, Jenni

The book costs £5 and all proceeds will go to Arthritis UK because I want to help fund research and make a difference to young people with arthritis. Arthritis UK have helped me a lot with advice and support. I've also been to online Art Club which is really good fun and a chance to bond with other young people who have arthritis.

Lyla

Lucy's story:

using lived experience to help change lives

I was diagnosed with arthritis just six months into my first full-time job after graduating from university.

Balancing being new at work with suddenly needing reasonable adjustments and frequent appointments made me feel vulnerable and unsupported. I didn't know anyone else my age with the condition, which made it an isolating, confusing and frightening time. Because I was young and living with a condition often seen as affecting 'older people', I felt not taken seriously, which meant I didn't get the support I needed to stay in my job.

This experience made me realise just how important raising awareness for arthritis is.

I contacted Arthritis UK's Young People and Families Service and became a member of our Young People's Panel. The Panel gave me access to other young people going through the same challenges, helping me build the support network I desperately needed. The service made me feel seen, heard and validated which is something I hadn't felt since my diagnosis. Through the Panel, I discovered how much the Charity is doing for young people and families, and how deeply lived experience is valued.

Being included in real work like campaigns, research, policy and more helped me

feel empowered and respected, and being able to use my lived experience to influence meaningful work has felt incredibly validating. It helped rebuild my confidence after a difficult diagnosis experience and reminded me that **my voice matters**.

The Panel showed me that I could have a career where my lived experience isn't a barrier but a strength.

Seeing how the Charity places lived experience at the heart of everything inspired me to apply for the role of Involvement Coordinator. Joining the team has given me the confidence to restart my career journey, knowing I have the adjustments and support I need. I'm now able to work directly with people with MSK conditions, helping shape and strengthen the Charity's work towards a future free of arthritis; something that feels deeply meaningful and full circle for me.

Lucy Gregory,
Involvement Coordinator, Arthritis UK

Training and support for health and care professionals

We know that one in seven GP consultations relates to musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions such as arthritis.[15] By training current and future health and care professionals, we aim to improve the treatment and care that people living with arthritis receive.

Our training sessions are designed to increase confidence, knowledge and practical skills in MSK care, helping ensure that people living with MSK conditions receive high-quality support from their health and care teams.

We have also launched our **SKILL**s Sessions: a fully funded webinar series designed to help health and care professionals build their **S**kills, **K**nowledge and **I**nformation needed for a career of **L**ife-long **L**earning. These sessions offer practical insights and professional support, allowing health and care professionals to focus on delivering the highest standard of care. Topics for these sessions are shaped by feedback from our SKILLs community and past attendees, ensuring each session reflects the most relevant and in-demand subjects.

We recognise that our health and care professionals bring valuable insight to every aspect of the Charity's work. To support this, our **Clinical and Care Expert Committee** is in place, and we have established a **Professional Advisory Community** that continues to grow and develop.

> **Really useful session. Everything was practically applicable. Examination feels much less intimidating under time pressure!**
>
> Core Skills attendee and trainee GP, England, November 2025

> **Useful overview of a range of conditions with relevant clinical examination, diagnostics and management tools**
>
> MSK Bitesize GP Training attendee and trainee GP, England, February 2026

[15] Jordan, K. P. et al (2010) Annual consultation prevalence of regional musculoskeletal problems in primary care: an observational study. BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders, 11, 144

110,000

Number of times our online resources were accessed.

96%
of our attendees would recommend our training and support to others.[16]

43%
average improvement in our attendees' knowledge of arthritis.[17]

1,400+
health and care professionals attended nine sessions at our most successful Primary Care Show yet.

[16, 17] Based on 617 survey responses

Primary Care Show 2025

6,000

health and care professionals attended the event.

500
professionals engaged directly with us at our exhibition stand.

9
educational sessions delivered across GP, Podiatry and Mother & Baby theatres.

1,400
attendees joined our sessions.

Knowledge and confidence increased significantly:

'Very knowledgeable' rose from
3.78% → 24.05%

'Fairly knowledgeable' rose from
35.46% → 56.33%

Strong demand for our resources, with information booklets among the most requested items.

Momentum continues: the team returned in 2026 to reach and upskill even more professionals.

Patient Voice

Our Patient Voice sessions give medical students and healthcare professionals direct access to people living with arthritis, MSK conditions and chronic pain. This helps students understand what it's like to live with these conditions and how care can better reflect people's real needs. We aim to help improve care with a particular focus on holistic care, the importance of self-management, and support for people living with arthritis and musculoskeletal pain.

Our volunteers are passionate about improving current and future healthcare professionals' understanding of arthritis. By sharing real experiences, they help build empathy and drive better outcomes for people with arthritis now and in the future.

Patient Voice volunteers also directly support healthcare service improvement programmes such as Modernising Patient Pathways.

Our wonderful volunteers contribute to:

- university sessions for medical students and GP trainees
- health service design and NHS service or quality improvement programmes
- service-user testing
- patient information initiatives; and
- curriculum development.

In the last year:

- We delivered **116** Patient Voice education and service improvement sessions to **1,739** participants across the UK, with **92%** of survey respondents agreeing that they understand Arthritis UK's offer and feel confident signposting people with arthritis to us.[18]

- We recruited **15** new Patient Voice volunteers.

"It's eye-opening to have someone with arthritis talk about their condition. It helps me better understand the disease and how it affects patients' quality of life so that I can help them tailor a treatment plan as a future pharmacist. The speaker did so well in presenting Arthritis UK and informing us about learning packages available for healthcare professionals.

Patient Voice delegate, Pharmacy Student, Scotland, February 2026

[18] Based on 148 survey respondents who agree or strongly agree with the statement

Kylie's story:
turning learning into better practice

What were the key learning points you took away from the training?

"The structure of the course enabled me to gain a comprehensive overview of conditions attributable to arthritis or other related conditions. This included key findings, presenting symptoms and cues that provided greater knowledge, awareness and improved pathways to aid diagnosis. The suite of validated assessment tools and resources that were supplied for each session were of great benefit.

The practical demonstrations, including physical assessments and history taking, also formed a large component of the course. Learning the specifics of these enabled me to build a greater confidence and a clear rationale for undertaking the skill, which I aim to incorporate within my practice.

Overall, the course provided a fantastic base for understanding MSK conditions and the ongoing management, particularly from a non-pharmaceutical perspective."

How will you use the learning to improve your practice?

"The course reinforced that the care we currently provide aligns with the current best practice guidelines such as exercise, diet modifications and weight loss. However, there is significant room for improvement, including discouraging surgery for initial treatment in particular conditions and the over-prescription and over-reliance of testing, such as imaging and blood work.

The utility of a thorough physical assessment and history taking is essential for an informed diagnosis and decision and further contributes to the establishment of a therapeutic and trusting relationship. This, along with the framing of affirmatory and positive language, will be more strongly advocated and used more within my practice."

How will this benefit your patients?

"I have learnt a number of guiding principles that I aim to introduce to my practice for patients under my care, which I hope will provide more robust support and a streamlined approach:

- To improve diagnosis.
- Treatment pathways that consider and emphasise the physical and emotional well-being of the patient.
- Raise the importance of preventative health measures."

"I was genuinely impressed by the professionalism and depth of knowledge demonstrated by the two presenters, who were incredibly engaging and filled you with a sense of optimism and positivity.

Kylie Page,
Effective Consultations course attendee,
February 2026

Advocacy work

We campaign to make sure that arthritis is seen as a national priority. We want governments and health services to take arthritis seriously, so that everyone can access the diagnosis, treatment and support they need, wherever they live in the UK.

Our **Cut to the Bone** campaign called on the UK Government to rethink planned cuts to the disability benefits system. Almost 40,000 of our community emailed their Member of Parliament (MP), asking them to help stop the cuts which threatened to have a disproportionate impact on people living with arthritis. Our campaign was part of a wider movement that contributed to the UK Government scrapping plans to cut the Personal Independence Payment (PIP). We have subsequently been working hard to ensure the experiences of people living with arthritis are heard loud and clear as part of the Government's review of PIP, led by Work and Pensions Minister Sir Stephen Timms MP. This has included convening a roundtable, where the Minister and his team met with people living with arthritis to hear about their experiences of PIP.

47,114

supporter actions taken.

We were invited to give oral evidence to the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee as part of their Transition to State Pension Age Inquiry, making the case for why people with arthritis and other MSK conditions need to be at the centre of decision-making around employment, benefits and pensions.

We published our **Left Waiting, Left Behind** report[19], which presents a powerful snapshot of the reality of living with arthritis. Drawing on findings from a survey of 7,928 people living with arthritis in the UK, the report covered experiences of diagnosis, treatment, management and support, along with accounts of the personal and financial cost of living with arthritis.

We also published **The State of Musculoskeletal Health 2025**[20], a collection of the most up-to-date UK-wide statistics on arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions.

England

In March 2026, we published our new briefing **Beyond BMI: Removing Harmful Barriers to Joint Replacement Surgery**[21]. The briefing sets out the extent to which Integrated Care Boards in England are using BMI thresholds as a way of rationing joint replacement surgery, which goes against both NICE and UK government guidance. Our briefing

[19] https://www.arthritis-uk.org/policy-and-data/health-intelligence/left-waiting-left-behind-the-reality-of-living-with-arthritis/
[20] https://www.arthritis-uk.org/media/flpbvm2m/arthritisuk_state_of_msk_health_-report_2025.pdf
[21] https://www.arthritis-uk.org/policy-and-data/fair-access-to-treatment/beyond-bmi-removing-harmful-barriers-to-joint-replacement-surgery

received extensive national media coverage and will inform ongoing influencing efforts to address barriers to joint replacement surgery and ensure people have access to weight management services.

Northern Ireland

This year we achieved two major milestones in Northern Ireland: the launch of our landmark report **From Breaking Point to Recovery: Prioritising Musculoskeletal Healthcare in Northern Ireland**[22], and successful parliamentary events calling for action in both adult and paediatric services. The report was launched at an event in the Long Gallery of Stormont Parliament Buildings, with around 100 attendees and speakers including Health Minster, Mike Nesbitt. It highlights Northern Ireland's position at a critical tipping point, with the longest waiting lists in the UK.

Wales

We continued to make arthritis a priority for the Welsh Government through our strong role in the NHS Wales MSK Network. As the only third sector organisation represented across the Clinical Leadership Group and eight working groups and sub-networks, we helped shape key policy and service design work throughout the year.

We also kept a strong focus on orthopaedic waiting times, sharing monthly data with Members of the Senedd, raising questions in the chamber and securing media coverage. Earlier in the year, we worked with the Welsh Government on public-facing communications for people on planned care waiting lists, now issued by all health boards.

[22] https://www.arthritis-uk.org/policy-and-data/health-intelligence/prioritising-musculoskeletal-healthcare-in-northern-ireland/

Scotland

A parliamentary event in September 2025 brought together clinicians from our Scotland MSK Advisory Group, alongside volunteers and staff, to engage Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) in Edinburgh on the major issues facing people with arthritis in Scotland. The event strengthened our political support: we recruited new MSP support for our Cross Party Group, one MSP arranged a visit to our services in the South of Scotland, and we secured a meeting with the Public Health Minister to discuss the government's approach to long-term conditions.

Our impact was further recognised through a parliamentary motion[23] congratulating Arthritis UK and our Scotland team for our contribution to the Scottish Parliament Arthritis and MSK Cross Party Group during the 2021 to 2026 session of parliament.

World Young Rheumatic Diseases Day (WORD)[24]

To coincide with World Young Rheumatic Diseases Day, we launched **Inside Arthritis**, a young people's art exhibition in Parliament, to shine a light on young people's experiences of growing up with rheumatic conditions.

We also marked the day at Stormont in Northern Ireland, raising awareness that children and young people can be diagnosed with arthritis, and calling for a managed transition between paediatric and adult rheumatology. Young people and families shared powerful stories about the challenges they face. Following the event, we secured a meeting with the Child Health Management Team from Belfast Trust to discuss paediatric staffing and transition services, ensuring momentum continues.

[23] https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-20868
[24] https://www.linkedin.com/company/wordday/

Research Partners

Involving people with arthritis in research

Throughout 2025/26, we continued to embed lived experience at the heart of our research by involving our Research Partners in funding decisions, and supporting research teams to involve lived experience in their projects. Together, we recorded 151 Research Partner reviews, helping us decide which research projects to fund, and providing insight that strengthens the quality of the research and supports the research teams in their work.

93%

of Research Partners believe that they make a meaningful difference to the work of Arthritis UK (a 13% increase on 2024/25).

> **It's given me confidence, knowledge and skills and another focus aside from my work.**
>
> Research Partner

> **I can clearly see that my opinions are very well valued.**
>
> Research Partner

> **Hearing different viewpoints helped me rethink and adjust parts of the study.**
>
> Research Partner

> **Patients bring fresh perspectives and often inspire confidence in pursuing key research questions.**
>
> Research Partner

Research

Biomechanics Impact Report

We celebrated the achievements of our **Biomechanics and Bioengineering Centre** in Cardiff with the launch of their **Impact Report**[25]. One of the aims of our Centres is to use their Arthritis UK affiliation to attract additional funding into critical areas of unmet need in arthritis research, and the Cardiff centre has delivered on that ambition. Their success means that our Cardiff Centre now houses the country's only fluoroscopy laboratory with dynamic 3D X-ray capability, one of only a few worldwide. This unique combination of technologies allows researchers to observe structures inside the body (such as joints) moving in real-time like a film, a bit like having X-ray vision. At the Centre, Professor Cathy Holt and her team are using this advanced equipment to deepen our understanding of joint movement and recovery in ways that were not previously possible.

Adolescent Centre Impact Report

We also celebrated the incredible achievement of our **Centre for Adolescent Rheumatology**, the first centre of its kind dedicated to advancing understanding of arthritis in children and young people. In April, we launched their **Impact Report**[26], showcasing major breakthroughs – from uncovering how biological sex influences the development of arthritis conditions, to driving progress in finding new treatments for JIA, and shaping the first evidence-based care pathways to support young people as they transition into adult services.

The Centre continues to be recognised globally for research with the potential to transform young lives. A standout example is the **APPLE** study[27], the largest of its kind investigating cardiovascular disease – a leading cause of mortality in young people with juvenile systemic

[25] hhttps://www.arthritis-uk.org/our-research/our-research-impact/our-research-centres/biomechanics-and-bioengineering-research-centre/biomechanics-and-bioengineering-research-centre-impact-report/

[26] https://www.arthritis-uk.org/media/gh1mtlds/va_adolescent-impact-report_final_spreads.pdf

[27] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37786302/

lupus erythematosus (JSLE). Arthritis UK Fellow Dr George Robinson helped lead the study in collaboration with colleagues in the UK and the US. Together, the team identified a biological signature that can predict which young people with JSLE are at most risk of atherosclerosis – an underlying cause of cardiovascular disease where fat and inflammation build up in the arteries. This discovery could enable earlier, more targeted support for those at greater risk. Its significance was highlighted when it was named one of the twelve most important studies of the year by a prestigious American journal[28].

“These findings were discovered thanks to the Centre’s biobank. It is pivotal to all this research. Without these samples, we can’t do the research. The biobank houses more than a decade’s worth of biological samples from gender and ethnically diverse JSLE patients and healthy individuals, with matched clinical data, making it a very valuable resource to investigate these questions robustly and longitudinally.

Dr George Robinson

Research breakthroughs

Nearly 20 years after our £2m investment into the **arcoGEN** study at Newcastle University, the programme continues to deliver world-leading discoveries. In April 2025, in collaboration with multiple international partners, the team published the largest ever study of the genetic links of osteoarthritis in the journal *Nature*[29], linking data from nearly two million people. Their findings revealed more than 700 new genetic links to osteoarthritis, with around one-in-ten involving genes that create proteins that can already be targeted with medicines approved for other conditions. This creates a powerful opportunity to accelerate the search for effective treatments for osteoarthritis. Our researchers are now investigating whether some of these drugs could be repurposed to help people living with osteoarthritis.

We have individual research impact reports from many of our Research Centres available: https://www.arthritis-uk.org/our-research/our-research-impact/our-research-centres/

[28] https://acrjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/acr.25549
[29] https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-025-08771-z

In July, our **MAPJAG** project co-funded with other government and charity funders[30] and a first-of-its-kind study for children with arthritis, revealed possible new disease targets (key biological factors involved in the disease)[31]. It has enabled us to understand for the first time what is happening in the joints of children with juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA). The results could help researchers to understand why some medicines work better for some than others.

"This study represents a real step change in our work with children and young people who live with arthritis. Rather than having to rely on blood tests which often do not tell us accurately what is happening in the joint, we can now directly analyse the joint lining, across different types of childhood arthritis and different ages.

Samples from children with arthritis looked different to adult samples, with a different make up of immune cells, blood vessels and distinct connective tissue cells. This suggests that treatments may need to vary depending on age and shows why we can't just extend studies from adult studies to understand arthritis in children.

Professor Lucy Wedderburn, who helped lead the study

The research also brings together expertise from two of our Centres of Excellence, the **Arthritis UK Research into Inflammatory Arthritis Centre (RACE)**, and our **Centre for Adolescent Rheumatology**. It marks an important step on the journey for our new research consortium **ARCADIA**, which is hoping to push this research further forwards.

Influence on policy

Our **Voices of Vasculitis** study is influencing government policy and best practice guidelines. The study set out to create a robust evidence base for how to set up and deliver services for people with vasculitis, to understand what good care looks like, and identify any barriers to good care. Its findings have become embedded in the 2025 British Society of Rheumatology recommendations, where it is cited as 'the most robust evidence on this topic to date', and also form part of the Scottish Government's **Rare Disease Action plan**[32], published in early 2026, helping to strengthen service design for people living with vasculitis.

[30] Medical Research Council (MRC), National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), Great Ormand Street Hospital Charity and others, and delivered through the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Birmingham Biomedical Research Centre (BRC)

[31] https://www.arthritis-uk.org/news/2025/july/first-of-its-kind-study-for-children-with-arthritis-reveals-possible-new-disease-targets/

[32] https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/progress-report/2026/02/rare-disease-action-plan-scotland-progress-report-2026/documents/rare-disease-action-plan-scotland-progress-report-february-2026/rare-disease-action-plan-scotland-progress-report-february-2026/govscot%3Adocument/rare-disease-action-plan-scotland-progress-report-february-2026.pdf

Our first cohort of researchers from our partnership with the Nuffield Foundation's **Oliver Bird Fund** have delivered highly valuable insights[33] for policy makers around the link between economic deprivation and unequal care in the UK. They showed how currently disconnected health care records, such as our GP, hospital and care worker records can be brought together using new technology, and how this could drive improvements in care for individuals and help to plan our regional health and care services better.

Breakaway innovation

Our research funding contributed to the launch of a new spinout company in 2025, **Refleks**, founded by Professor Francesco Dell'Accio and Dr. Suzanne Eldridge at Queen Mary University of London (QMUL). It specialises in cutting-edge medicine that involves regenerating tissues in the joint, like cartilage.

There are currently no available medicines to treat the cause of osteoarthritis. There are some treatments such as microfracture or autologous chondrocyte implantation that can help repair cartilage, but they aren't suitable for most people, and they are complex to carry out. **But thanks to our funding, the Refleks team discovered that a molecule in the body called 'Agrin' can drive the repair of cartilage, as well as restore joint function and provide long lasting reduction in pain**.

Perhaps most exciting is that Agrin has the potential to be easily manufactured. Arthritis UK provided vital research funding that contributed to the development of the intellectual property that led to the launch of **Refleks** and continues to fund the research team at QMUL as they push forwards towards early-stage clinical trials.

[33] https://www.arthritis-uk.org/our-research/research-we-fund/research-highlight-of-the-year/researching-how-socioeconomic-inequalities-can-impact-musculoskeletal-pain-and-primary-care/?v=8z2WiaC8V24

If you need support, please contact the Helpline on **0800 5200 520**, email **helpline@arthritis-uk.org** or visit the online community.

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