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Living with a musculoskeletal condition has negatively impacted the lives of 93% of Australian people surveyed according to results from Musculoskeletal Australia

Musculoskeletal Australia (MSK) conducted the largest and most comprehensive consumer-driven survey in Australia to understand the impacts experienced by 7 million Australians with musculoskeletal conditions. At any stage in life bones, muscles, joints, cartilage, ligaments, tendons, and bursae can be affected by musculoskeletal conditions.

Over half of the participants surveyed (66%) revealed that their musculoskeletal condition impacts their ability to socialise with friends and family. 26% of participants also indicated they did not look to form new friendships as their condition stops them from nurturing new relationships. Lack of socialising can result in profound changes in mental health.

In addition to reporting challenges with their ability to work (66%), 29% of people reported having to retire early due to their conditions. 65% of respondents also stated they experience financial stress as a result of their musculoskeletal condition.

Over half (54%) of survey participants reported their ability to carry out fundamental daily activities like cooking, grocery shopping, and getting around is affected by their musculoskeletal conditions.

Alarmingly, the survey also revealed that 72% of participants' conditions affect their sleep. As a result of poor sleep, people living with musculoskeletal conditions can be prone to experiencing aggravated pain and increased inflammation. Additionally, poor sleep can dampen an individual's mood and overall wellbeing which can make it difficult to rest and recover.

The report also indicated:

- 80% of those surveyed reported they had other health conditions, with the most common being high blood pressure (30%), followed by mental health conditions (24%)
- 49% of people said they are affected by musculoskeletal pain seven days a week, and over half said their condition affects their ability to enjoy life in general (52%)
- 76% of participants reported that their condition affects their ability to be physically active, along with 30% finding that carrying out personal care, such as showering or getting dressed, is affected by their condition
- 39% of respondents reported that their condition impacts their ability to concentrate, which has negative implications for students as concentration is a pre-requisite for success
- 45% of participants feel that they are not able to make firm social commitments, and others (63%) need to monitor the amount of social activity they undertake
- A significant number of respondents felt isolated, with 30% of people reporting their condition affects their ability to drive, and 21% of people said their ability to take public transport or travel by plane is affected by their condition
- Of the 65% of people who had experienced financial stress as a result of having a musculoskeletal condition, 50% listed the cost of specialist appointments as the most common cause of financial stress, followed by allied health appointments (46%) and the cost of medications (39%)

"With musculoskeletal conditions affecting one in three Australians, it was imperative to understand the personal impacts that fellow Australians experience daily," says Rob Anderson, CEO of Musculoskeletal Australia. "This report reveals why so many are crying out for compassion, for understanding, for change, and the survey data now provides us

with the opportunity to offer more support for the unwanted and difficult conditions that have intruded into people's lives."

Given musculoskeletal conditions are the leading contributor to disability worldwide and a common cause for early retirement, the results from this survey will shape a consumer-driven response to make necessary changes required to enhance healthcare for people with musculoskeletal conditions.

With over 150 different types, musculoskeletal conditions can affect anyone from any age or background. Conditions such as back pain, osteoarthritis, fibromyalgia, and lupus, among others, are a national health priority. MSK expects that the number of Australians living with one or more musculoskeletal condition will grow to 8.7 million people by 2032.

"Musculoskeletal Australia is committed to assisting all Australians living with musculoskeletal conditions," says Rob Anderson. "With these personal insights, we can raise awareness, build better programs, and advocate for enhanced care for the 7 million Australians living with musculoskeletal conditions."

Developed in close consultation with the MSK Consumer Advisory Committee, the first-ever national survey was open from August to October 2020.

"Living with multiple musculoskeletal conditions for over 40 years since the age of 15, I have come across almost every issue identified in this valuable consumer survey," says Annie McPherson, Chair of the MSK Consumer Advisory Committee. "This survey has been such an important process to allow the voices of people with musculoskeletal conditions to be heard and to make visible the impact of these conditions on their lives. It is so important for health consumers to have the most up-to-date health information to guide informed decisions and manage their conditions on a daily basis. I just wish good quality information and services had been available to my mother and I in regional Victoria in the early 1970s – perhaps I would not be so crippled and limited in my physical abilities these days."

The survey provided the opportunity for the one in three Australians affected by these often-invisible conditions to share their story. Receiving responses from 3,453 people of all ages, locations, and backgrounds has provided a broad and robust sample of the population of those living with musculoskeletal conditions or parents caring for children with these conditions.

The report can be found here: www.msk.org.au/mskconsumersurvey2020/

For more information, please visit www.msk.org.au

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Notes for Editor:

Based on the survey results, areas of action to improve the lives of those with musculoskeletal conditions include:

- Improving community knowledge and understanding of musculoskeletal conditions and how they affect people
- Increasing awareness of resources available for both employers to support employees with conditions and for employees themselves
- Providing affordable services and financial assistance so people can get the care they need
- Promoting support to people to practise self-care and developing dedicated self-care programs to assist the management of conditions
- Advocating for government to improve the integration of services to improve management of conditions
- Using consumer voices and data to guide the provision of programs and services and to advocate for better care

About Musculoskeletal Australia

Musculoskeletal Australia (MSK) is a consumer-driven organisation working to support people for better musculoskeletal health (www.msk.org.au). MSK focuses solely on meeting the needs of Australians with a broad range of musculoskeletal conditions and does this by providing them with information, education and support and undertaking policy and advocacy work. MSK provides comprehensive online information, telephone support and information via a

national Help Line, education via consumer-focused webinars, comprehensive resources for children with juvenile idiopathic arthritis, their families and teachers and a network of in-person and online peer support groups.

MSK has been supporting people with arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions for over 50 years. The organisation started in 1968, when Dr Leslie Koadlow, his secretary Alice Petty and consumer Mollie Riches decided things could be better to support people living with these conditions.

National Help Line: 1800 263 265

Website: www.msk.org.au

Instagram: [@mskaust](https://www.instagram.com/mskaust)

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