

ARTHRITIS SOCIETY CANADA

ONTARIO 2023 PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS SUBMISSION

Delivered to:

The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy
Minister of Finance

February 2023



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Charitable Number: 108071671 RR0003



INTRODUCTION

On behalf of Arthritis Society Canada, we appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the 2023 pre-budget consultations.

Arthritis Society Canada is the country's national charity dedicated to extinguishing arthritis. We represent the six million Canadians living with arthritis today, and the millions more who are impacted or at risk. There is no cure for arthritis, and the pain it causes deprives people of time with friends and family, reduces mobility and diminishes quality of life. Arthritis is a leading cause of workplace disability and one of the major health challenges facing our health care system today. With a growing and aging population, the number of Ontarians living with arthritis is expected to grow. By 2035, more than 3.3 million Ontarians will have arthritis, many of them under the age of 65.

As you begin your budget consultations, we are pleased to provide four detailed recommendations, that will help support the more than 2.3 million Ontarians living with arthritis today:

- 1) Continue to address wait times for joint replacements**
- 2) Ensure access to a range of arthritis treatment options**
- 3) Support community-based care for people living with arthritis through the Arthritis Rehabilitation and Education Program (AREP)**
- 4) Support innovative solutions and research to help extinguish arthritis**

1. Continue to address wait times for joint replacements

Arthritis is the leading cause of joint replacement, including over 99% of knee replacements and more than 70% of hip replacements. With the number of people with arthritis expected to balloon by 2035, even more people will need joint replacements.

According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), the benchmark wait time for hip and knee replacements is 182 days. The most [recent CIHI data](#) shows that 27% of Ontarians waiting for hip and knee replacement did not have their surgeries performed within the recommended time. CIHI data also shows inconsistency across the province in meeting targets, with some regions have a much lower percentage meeting the six-month target.

This prolonged wait is leading to unnecessary pain and suffering for many Ontarians who are prevented from contributing to their families, communities, and workplaces. There are potential downstream health impacts that increased wait times could have for arthritis patients waiting for joint replacement surgery, such as the increased use of opioids for pain relief. Surgery delays are not only devastating for individuals but can also lead to significant additional costs for the healthcare system due to the co-morbidities associated with the disease, including weight gain, diabetes, heart and circulatory issues, mental health conditions, and other compounding health challenges.



We were pleased with the \$300 million investment in the 2022-23 budget for the Surgical Recovery Strategy and the recent announcement to integrate community surgical centres to perform joint replacement surgeries. As the government implements its plan for surgical and diagnostic centres, Arthritis Society Canada reinforces that the model must be focused on improving health outcomes, include high-quality standards and data tracking, integrate with other hospitals and health systems and be transparent and publicly-funded. As the majority of people waiting in pain for joint replacement surgeries live with arthritis, it is critical that the arthritis community voice be part of discussions. We look forward to working with the Ontario government to make sure that people with arthritis living in unbearable pain do not have to wait for the surgery they need.

Arthritis Society Canada's report [The Wait: Addressing Canada's Critical Backlog of Hip and Knee Replacement Surgeries](#) provides a wide-range of solutions to innovate and achieve effective patient-centred care both provincially and nationally that include:

- a. Ensuring innovative models of care are replicated and shared widely so more patients have access to their benefits
- b. Standardizing how patient data is collected and reported to make it easier to set national standards and benchmarks
- c. Leveraging digital technology to reduce wait times, maximize limited health resources and improve co-ordination of care
- d. Increasing access to community-based joint health management programs so more patients have access to proven programs that effectively manage pain pre-op and better optimize results post-op
- e. Ensuring savings from surgical efficiencies are re-invested into improving arthritis patient care.

2. Ensure access to a range of arthritis treatment options

Arthritis symptoms can range from mild to severe. Most people with arthritis experience chronic pain, fatigue, restricted mobility, lowered mood and other symptoms that can combine to erode their quality of life. Left untreated, inflammation can lead to significant and often irreparable damage to the affected areas, resulting in loss of function and disability. There is no cure, so medications play a significant role in helping people manage their condition.

Pharmacological treatments are critical to the management of arthritis, which typically persists for many years, if not a lifetime. In the case of inflammatory arthritis, for example, treatments are still very much trial and error: what works for one person may not for another, and its about finding the right treatment at the right time. A range of choices and solutions is therefore critical.

We were pleased to be included in the government's announcement of its biosimilars initiative. Arthritis Society Canada believes that [biosimilars](#) have a role to play in the care and management of inflammatory arthritis. Biosimilars provide additional choices for those living with inflammatory arthritis and have the



potential to lower health care costs and increase access to treatment. We look forward to continuing to work with government as it rolls out its biosimilars policy.

Medical cannabis is also an important pain management option for many people living with the fire of arthritis. About 1 in 4 Canadians using medical cannabis use it to manage arthritis specifically. While cannabis for medical purposes requires a medical authorization by a healthcare professional, it is subject to sales and excise taxes, which is inconsistent with the taxation of prescription drugs and medical necessities.

Exempting the provincial tax portion from the HST for medical cannabis would provide some financial relief for patients during this difficult time and underscore a clear and important distinction between medical versus recreational cannabis, paving the way for medical cannabis to be recognized and treated as medicine.

3. Support community-based care for people living with arthritis through the Arthritis Rehabilitation and Education Program (AREP)

The Arthritis Rehabilitation and Education Program (AREP) is a \$5 million program delivered by Arthritis Society Canada with funding from the Ministry of Health. AREP is perfectly aligned with the Government's stated goal of providing community-based care, serving rural and remote Ontarians, filling a need for those who don't have easy access to services. AREP diverts Ontarians living with arthritis from the high-cost acute care services and provides access to an innovative model of care that is best suited to their needs. The program provides community-based physiotherapy, occupational therapy and social work rehabilitation services and has been doing so for over 50 years.

AREP serves the entire province of Ontario with team members located in all major regions and clinical team member provide care and education to over 12,000 unique individuals per year. Patients are assessed and treated, with an emphasis on adaptations to ensure reduced pain, safe exercise, splinting, counselling on self-management strategies, and reinforcement of safe use of medications.

AREP's community operations are built on partnerships with other community organizations to bring service to the patient in a model that is focused on: patient-centred care, interprofessional care, collaboration with other providers and improved access to care. The teaching and application of self-management practices helps patients to better manage their arthritic condition and other chronic diseases they may have.

4. Support innovative solutions and research to help extinguish arthritis

Arthritis Society Canada was pleased to see the government's funding commitment for the Life Sciences Innovation Program in the 2022-23 Budget. As Canada's most common chronic disease that has no cure, there is an urgent need for innovative solutions to help those living with this debilitating condition. Arthritis Society Canada launched an Innovation Strategy with the purpose of creating transformational



health change for Canadians living with arthritis and to accelerate the success of innovators working in this field. To date, we have awarded \$200,000 towards 4 innovative arthritis solutions through our Ideator Program, selected an innovation intervention through our Social Impact Program, and are funding 12 high-risk, high-reward research projects representing a commitment of \$1.2 million through our new Ignite Innovation Grants.

We encourage the government to work with us to support innovative technologies and research to help improve the health of all Ontarians, especially those living with the fire of arthritis.

CONCLUSION

In closing, we urge the Government of Ontario to implement our four key 2023 pre-Budget recommendations that will add cost-effective sustainability to the healthcare system and support a healthy population of Ontarians.

About Arthritis Society Canada

Arthritis Society Canada is the country's national charity dedicated to fighting the fire of arthritis with the fire of research, advocacy and information and support. With the support of our donors and volunteers, we are all in to end arthritis, so people with arthritis can live their best life free from arthritis. Arthritis Society Canada is accredited under Imagine Canada's Standards Program.



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