

# ARTHRITIS ACTION NOW: The Plan to End Arthritis in Canada

## Executive Summary

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### THE CRISIS WE FACE

Arthritis is Canada's silent epidemic. More than **6 million Canadians** live with arthritis today, affecting more people than diabetes, heart disease, stroke, cancer, and dementia combined. Yet arthritis remains dangerously misunderstood, chronically underfunded, and systematically ignored.

#### The reality is stark:

- € **1 in 4 women** and **1 in 6 men** have arthritis
- € **25,000 children and youth** currently seek healthcare for arthritis
- € **\$45.9 billion** annual drain on Canada's economy
- € **#1 cause of disability**, forcing millions from work and community life
- € **9 million Canadians** will have arthritis by 2045 without immediate action

This isn't about aging—it's about a complex disease that systematically attacks joints, tissues, and organs across all ages and communities. There are over 100 types of arthritis and related diseases, including osteoarthritis, gout, rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, psoriatic arthritis, juvenile arthritis, lupus, vasculitis, and many more - some of which are life-threatening.

**Arthritis is a health issue that can no longer be ignored.**

### UNPRECEDENTED UNITY FOR CHANGE

In 2023, Canada's arthritis community achieved something historic: **21 champion organizations** representing patients, researchers, clinicians, and advocates united behind a single comprehensive strategy. Together, we engaged more than **100,000 Canadians** in the largest consultation ever conducted on arthritis in Canada.

What emerged is **Arthritis Action Now**—not just another report, but a mobilization blueprint designed for immediate implementation across three strategic pillars.

## THREE PILLARS FOR TRANSFORMATION

Arthritis Action Now identifies three interconnected pathways, each designed to mobilize specific decision-makers while creating synergistic impact.

### PILLAR 1: POLICY PRIORITIES

**Target Audience:** Federal, provincial, and territorial governments

**Core Demand:** Immediate policy reform and strategic investment

#### Priority 1: Timely, Appropriate and Inclusive Prevention and Care

- € Build and strengthen standardized arthritis care pathways from childhood through adulthood
- € Accelerate access to new therapies—Canada ranks last among G7 countries for patient access to approved medicines
- € Co-develop culturally safe prevention and care with Indigenous communities who face arthritis rates up to 3 times higher than other populations

#### Priority 2: Reduce Arthritis-Related Disability

- € Fund community-based self-management and support programs that reduce pain and improve function
- € Reduce surgical wait times—only 68% of hip replacements and 61% of knee replacements meet recommended benchmarks
- € Implement targeted prevention and awareness programs, especially for youth athletes where up to 45% sustain joint injuries

#### Priority 3: Canada as Global Research Leader

- € Increase investment in arthritis research - reverse the 24% decline in federal arthritis research investments in recent years
- € Implement pan-Canadian health data strategy with arthritis-specific metrics and equity indicators
- € Fund Indigenous-led research honoring Indigenous ways of knowing

### PILLAR 2: RESEARCH & INNOVATION PRIORITIES

**Target Audience:** Research institutions, funding agencies, scientific community

**Core Demand:** Strategic research investment to unlock discoveries from prevention to better treatments and cures

#### Game-Changing Research Areas:

**High-Quality, Integrated Data and Clinical Research Platforms:** The foundation enabling all breakthroughs—technology-powered diagnosis, predictive analytics, and real-time monitoring leveraging Canada's universal healthcare system covering 41 million people.

**Osteoarthritis Treatment Breakthroughs:** Developing the world's first disease-modifying treatment for osteoarthritis—shifting from symptom management to reversing joint damage for 4.5 million Canadians.

**Inflammatory Arthritis Remission:** Long-lasting, sustainable and cost-effective remission and cures for adults and children with conditions like rheumatoid arthritis and lupus, moving beyond lifelong medication dependence.

**Indigenous-Led Research:** Indigenous Peoples leading research that honors Indigenous ways of knowing, integrates traditional and Western healing practices, and addresses the disproportionate arthritis burden while respecting data sovereignty.

**Innovative Life and Care Solutions:** Developing comprehensive support systems that address work, relationships, mental health, and community participation—because arthritis impacts all aspects of your life.

## **PILLAR 3: CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE**

**Target Audience:** Philanthropic investors, corporate partners, donors

**Core Demand:** Strategic investment in high-impact initiatives

**Accelerating Paths to Cures:** Fund world-class research addressing chronic underfunding – Arthritis is awarded less than 2% of investment from Canada's largest federal funder of health research, despite affecting more people than any other chronic disease.

**Precision Medicine with AI:** Position Canada as a global leader in AI-powered arthritis care—from predicting who will develop arthritis to personalizing treatments that work on the first try.

**Igniting Arthritis Innovation:** Launch the Arthritis Accelerator to support a comprehensive arthritis innovation pipeline to fill the critical gap between research and real-world solutions – where breakthrough discoveries move from labs to patients in months, not decades.

**Youth Prevention Programs:** Prevent arthritis in the next generation through joint health education and injury prevention—modeling successful initiatives like Rowan's Law for concussion safety.

**Closing the Gap in Childhood Care:** Ensure 25,000 children with arthritis receive timely diagnosis and equitable treatment, preventing lifelong disability from undiagnosed inflammatory diseases.

**Advancing Arthritis Equity:** Support underserved communities to create culturally relevant education, support, and care navigation resources.

**Addressing Arthritis in Women:** Invest in research dedicated to the interface of arthritis and women's health, raising arthritis awareness in women, and connect the spheres of women's

health and arthritis services to transform the health and wellbeing of millions of women in Canada.

**Arthritis Aware Workplaces:** Retain talent and boost productivity by supporting 3 million working-age people with arthritis through evidence-based accommodations and prevention programs.

**Making Arthritis Impossible to Ignore:** Join us to create a national campaign and mainstream conversation about arthritis.

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## THE JOURNEY TO TRANSFORMATION

### By 2035: Equitable Access Foundation

- € Reduce surgical wait times to recommended benchmarks
- € Increase numbers of rheumatologists to meet population needs
- € Expand community-based rehabilitation and support programs
- € Expedite and streamline access to new arthritis medications
- € Collect arthritis data for Indigenous, Black, and other underserved communities
- € Recognize arthritis as episodic disability in support programs

### By 2040: Prevention and Breakthroughs

- € Implement youth arthritis prevention programs nationwide
- € Double number of arthritis clinical trials in Canada
- € Advance discovery of disease-modifying osteoarthritis treatments
- € Achieve world-leading integrated arthritis data platforms

### By 2045: Global Leadership and Impact

- € Discover first osteoarthritis disease-modifying treatment
- € Put at least one inflammatory disease in long-term remission
- € Reduce arthritis-associated disability significantly
- € Generate economic returns through reduced healthcare costs and increased productivity
- € Establish Canada as global destination for arthritis innovation

## THE ECONOMIC IMPERATIVE

This isn't just a health challenge—it's an economic crisis demanding immediate action:

- € **\$45.9 billion annual cost** will escalate without intervention
- € **Canada's leading cause of disability** removes productive workers during peak earning years

- € **85% of workers with arthritis** report disease affects job performance
- € **Investment in prevention and early treatment** generates significant economic returns

## YOUR ROLE IN TRANSFORMATION

**For Government Leaders:** Champion immediate policy implementation. Every year of delay deepens preventable disability and economic drain. The policy priorities provide you an actionable framework.

**For Researchers and Institutions:** Advance strategic research priorities positioning Canada for global leadership. Collaborate across institutions and funders to accelerate discovery and translation into real-world impact.

**For Healthcare Providers:** Lead evidence-driven arthritis care standards, support team-based models, and champion culturally safe approaches addressing the needs of Indigenous, Black and other underserved communities.

**For Corporate Partners and Donors:** Fund breakthrough research and innovation, scale workplace health initiatives, and support prevention and equitable care programs. These investments will make a measurable social impact.

**For Everyone:** Join the movement in making arthritis impossible to ignore. Use your voice and platform to elevate arthritis as a national health priority. Share stories, demand policy reform, and support millions of people in Canada with arthritis.

## THE TIME FOR ACTION IS NOW

The crisis is accelerating. The economic case is undeniable. The science is ready. The ecosystem is aligned. **Arthritis Action Now** provides the roadmap. The time to act is now.

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*For more information about Arthritis Action Now: The Plan to End Arthritis in Canada, visit [www.arthritisactionplan.ca](http://www.arthritisactionplan.ca) or contact [info@arthritis.ca](mailto:info@arthritis.ca)*