



Special Commission of Inquiry into Healthcare Funding

Submission Number: 105
Name: Arthritis NSW
Date Received: 9/11/2023

6 November 2023

Mr Richard Beasley SC
Commissioner of the NSW Government Inquiry into Healthcare Funding
Send via: submissions.hfi@specialcommission.nsw.gov.au

Dear Commissioner,

Re: Arthritis NSW – Submission to NSW Government’s Special Commission of Inquiry into Healthcare Funding

I write to you on behalf of Arthritis NSW to make a submission to the NSW Government’s Special Commission of Inquiry into Healthcare Funding.

We appreciate the consideration that enables this submission beyond the closing date – confirmed in letter dated 31/10/2023, forwarded by Kate Bell and signed by Patrick Mullane, Special Counsel, Special Commission of Inquiry into Healthcare Funding

Executive Summary

This submission includes a focus on:

- Value of integrated care
- Workforce challenges particularly in rheumatology specialist positions, and the value of better educating non-specialist health professionals
- The potential for alternate models of care, particularly digital supports – with the “Arthritis Hub” (working title) offering potential value for millions of people.

and recommends:

- Increased opportunity for intersectoral partnership and collaboration (e.g., implementation of integrated care through Health, commercial and NFP partnerships)
- Review of NSW specialist workforce (e.g., Paediatric Rheumatologist/Allied health) allocations, public/private distributions, and increased arthritis-specific training and awareness within tertiary care settings.
- Support and funding allocated to new and innovative models of care and approaches that support access to information and care within the community.

About Arthritis NSW

Arthritis NSW (ANSW) is a leading provider of support and education for people with arthritis and works to empower the individual to manage their own condition and health. We are a trusted source of timely,

evidence-based information on arthritis and its treatment, with education programs delivered across several platforms, including webinars, workshops, and community awareness sessions.

Arthritis NSW supports the inquiry into healthcare funding and wishes to focus on the following reference points:

- A.** To manage the increased prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in an ageing population, the adoption of an integrated care approach (i.e., one that ensures that individuals can seek health support from a range of organisations and settings when and where they require them) will be necessary to ensure that unhealthy people have more opportunity to engage in evidence-based, cost-effective conservative strategies, like weight loss and exercise. This is necessary to halt the progression of diseases like arthritis to degrees that create significant burden and increase the complexity and frequency of care episodes required within an already over-strained and expensive healthcare system. Arthritis NSW, as a community-based organisation is well-placed to support individuals with arthritis with these types of cost-saving conservative strategies.

- B. i.** Arthritis NSW appreciates the local input and management provided by the current governance model in NSW but highlights structural issues hindering service integration. The partnership between Local Health Districts (LHDs) and non-government organizations faces challenges, including that partnerships reduce funding available for LHDs themselves (ie partnership funding comes from LHD budgets). Clarity in decision-making powers between NSW Health and LHDs, and separation of budgets is recommended for more effective collaboration.

- B. ii.** Community engagement and co-design have played a pivotal role in shaping Arthritis NSW's services. Everyone benefits from this approach. Involving affected communities in identification, planning, and improvement processes has proven beneficial, particularly in refining programs like kids' camps, webinars and the Rural Health Initiatives. Arthritis NSW welcomes reforms promoting greater consumer involvement for enhanced value-based care in the healthcare ecosystem.

- B. iv.** Arthritis NSW acknowledges a persistent and profound shortage of rheumatologists in NSW, falling well below international standards. A 2021 workforce report by The Australian Rheumatology Association reveals the need for 682 rheumatologists and 61 paediatric rheumatologists to meet these standards. The current distribution may exacerbate public health support challenges, suggesting solutions through increased public sector resources or improved collaboration between private and public rheumatologists for equitable outcomes in NSW.

- G.** Arthritis NSW would advocate for more training and upskilling of specialists and allied health professionals. Consumers have cited numerous examples of engagements with health professionals that have resulted in sub-optimal diagnosis, referral and/or treatment and management outcomes. There is a clear need for more training to be provided to General

Practitioners and allied health professionals on arthritis (and other NCDs), which is evident given their continued rise in the current NSW population.

- H.** The absence of short-medium solutions to the workforce and specialty services sought by the community underlines a critical need to consider other innovative models that can help support access to services or information to help people stay well, and avoid engagement with the healthcare system. Arthritis NSW is developing a digital platform (working name 'Arthritis Hub') designed to aggregate and centralise pre-existing, high-quality, useful, and relevant health resources (e.g., information sheets, and tools) to address this current need. This project has the potential to affect health outcomes for hundreds of thousands of people, keeping them healthy, happy and out of the NSW Health system. There is substantial scope for the NSW Health system to consider ways of working with non-government partners to ensure that more people, especially those living rurally, have access to appropriate levels of support. While this does not replace specialist care, there are opportunities to better manage conditions such as arthritis that are currently not being utilised. We can help with this for the million people with arthritis in NSW.

Arthritis NSW is happy to provide additional information that may assist the inquiry to make recommendations to better support people living with arthritis to access the care and support they need to participate fully in their communities. We welcome the opportunity to be involved in further work where it can be of use to the Commissioner and Inquiry team in working to determine their recommendations.

We welcome the chance to be able to make this submission to the inquiry. Please feel free to reach out at any time [REDACTED]

Warm regards,



Alex Green

CEO

Arthritis NSW