



## **ARTHRITIS QUEENSLAND AND THE AUSTRALIAN RHEUMATOLOGY ASSOCIATION QUEENSLAND'S STATE ELECTION PRIORITIES**

More than 456,139 Queenslanders are diagnosed with arthritis, making it the second most common long-term health condition in Queensland. Despite this, limited support pathways are currently available within the public health system and specialists are in critically short supply. In fact, the 2023 Workforce Report by the Australian Rheumatology Association found that **Queensland has the lowest number of rheumatologists** in the country at just 1.34 full time specialists per 100,000 Queenslanders.

With arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions already costing Australia's health system an estimated \$14 billion annually, there is a need for further outreach, support, and education services at a state level. The commitments we are seeking will have a significant and cost effective impact on Queensland's health services.

Easily accessible support and medical information for those living with arthritis, no matter where they live, is our key priority for the upcoming Queensland State Election. Arthritis Queensland (AQ) and the Australian Rheumatology Association Queensland (ARAQ) are seeking commitments from Queensland leaders on the following initiatives:

### **1. Clinical Nurse Consultants for each QH Rheumatology Service and pilot program**

Nurse Consultants for each QH Rheumatology Service are currently unsupported. As a lynchpin in care delivery in the rheumatology space the team are seeking further funding to ensure clinical nurse consultant places. In addition, in partnership with a Queensland based University, AQ proposes to research an ideal model for a Regional Rheumatology Nurse Program which would provide participants access to telehealth support, FIFO Rheumatologist support, and more. Subject to evaluation, the Nurse Pilot Program would then inform the development of a roll-out model.

### **2. Expansion of online exercise programs**

AQ & ARAQ are seeking a long term commitment for our 12-week online exercise programs. This program is a weekly virtual group exercise program which hundreds of participants join from the comfort of their home. The program is tailored to focus on participants problem areas of arthritis, provide healthy pain management alternatives, help relieve discomfort, and help participants get back to a more manageable day to day life. Arthritis Queensland has previously received ActiveKIT funding for our online exercise program but is seeking secured ongoing funding to provide the low cost service to more Queensland households.

### **3. Funding for local education programs**

AQ & ARAQ are seeking support for a partnership with Queensland Health to identify local areas most in need of Arthritis workshops, similar to models already active in other states. The events, attended by those with arthritis, health specialists, and family members focus on awareness, education, and support avenues for patients. These workshops will equip participants with the tools they need to manage their condition with the support of allied health professionals. AQ is seeking additional funding to roll these programs out in areas identified by Queensland Health, most likely to be in more regional communities.

#### **4. Increased adult rheumatology services and trainees in Queensland**

AQ & ARAQ are calling for the service level agreement model between Metro North HHS and Wide Bay HHS, and Central HHS to be expanded to 1 FTE specialist per HHS to service Maryborough/Bundaberg and Gladstone respectively. This model can be replicated to other services, such as Townsville HHS to Mackay Base Hospital, West Moreton HHS to Boonah, Dalby, Esk, Laidley & Cairns HHS to Cooktown, Thursday Island and Weipa. Additionally, the organisations are seeking three additional advanced rheumatology trainees for 2025.

#### **5. Additional paediatric rheumatology support and outreach model**

AQ & ARAQ are seeking an additional 1 FTE paediatric rheumatologist and appropriate nursing, allied health and administration staff at Queensland Children's Hospital to establish outreach model of visiting paediatric rheumatologists to provide care closer to home starting with Cairns, Mackay, Hervey Bay, and Sunshine Coast.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the value and limitations of telehealth. For many patients, face-to-face visits remain an important part of best-practice care, particularly for the First Nations people, care provided on Country rather than requiring long-distance travel is vital.

### **About Arthritis Queensland**

Arthritis Queensland is a not-for-profit organisation founded in 1976 and provides education, information and support for children and adults living with arthritis. Our regional roadshow program brings together health professionals, experts and those suffering from arthritis together in a chosen community to provide invaluable information, support and practical advice on managing the condition.

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