



**Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance**

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Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt  
Chancellor of the Exchequer,  
1 Horse Guards Road  
Westminster  
London  
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Dear Chancellor,

We are writing to you as representatives of organisations and charities supporting people living with musculoskeletal conditions. We wish to highlight the particular challenges they face in relation to the cost of living crisis as you prepare your tax and spending plans.

Musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions, such as arthritis and osteoporosis, are the largest cause of years lived with disability in the UK and affect people of all ages. MSK conditions affect people's ability to work, with many working part time or unable to work at all. This leaves many people with MSK conditions on lower incomes or on disability benefits – exactly the people most impacted by rising costs of fuel and food.

Added to this, the pain and stiffness associated with many MSK conditions can be made much worse by cold. The Energy Price Guarantee was welcome but energy prices are still over 50% more than they were this time last year. This, combined with general inflation, is causing many to cut back on basics, leaving people with the choice between going into debt to pay heating bills or facing increased pain with the associated risks of needing additional healthcare and potentially falling out of work.

The long waits for NHS treatments in hospital and in the community are leading many to spend money they can ill afford on private treatment. This leaves them even less resilient in the face of cost of living rises.

Analysis of the UK Labour Force Survey has revealed that the number of working-age Britons unable to work due to chronic pain has risen by almost 200,000 in the past two years, compared with a decline in the trend in previous years. We cannot afford this at a time when the economy needs to grow.

We understand that you will need to take difficult economic decisions. However, we also urge you to consider the impact on individuals with MSK conditions as well as the NHS health

professionals who treat them, and the needs of the economy. We urge you to take action on the following:

- The need for additional support on fuel costs and cost of living rises to be targeted at those who need it most, which should include those with conditions where keeping warm is essential.
- The need to increase benefits in line with inflation and reduce the cost of long-term conditions by at least pausing prescription charges to ensure that the people most vulnerable to rising prices do not fall into poverty and debt.
- Now is not the time to reduce funding to the NHS. We need to address the workforce crisis in the NHS, including ensuring that we retain staff by providing pay and conditions commensurate with the valuable role they play. Unless we can recover the current backlogs in MSK treatment, increasing numbers of people with MSK conditions will have to reduce or stop work.

We urge you to keep these points in mind as you make the difficult decisions you need to in the coming days.

Yours sincerely,

Sue Brown, Chief Executive, Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance

Shantel Irwin, Chief Executive, Arthritis Action

Lynda Phillips, Chief Executive, British Association of Sport and Exercise Medicine

Oliver Coburn, Operations Manager & Registrar, British Association of Sport Rehabilitators

Catherine Quinn, President, British Chiropractic Association

Liz Stockley, Chief Executive, British Dietetic Association

Deborah Eastwood, President, British Orthopaedic Association

Professor Karen Middleton CBE FCSP MA, Chief Executive, The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

Prof Anthony Woolf, Chair, Cornwall Arthritis Trust

Kay Julier, Managing Director, The Ehlers Danlos Support UK

Dr Natasha Jones, President, Faculty of Sport and Exercise Medicine UK

Natalie Beswetherick, Chairman, Gloucestershire Arthritis Trust

Lisa Bone, Chief Executive, Hypermobility Syndromes Association

Maurice Cheng, Chief Executive, The Institute of Osteopathy

Dr Dale Webb, Chief Executive, National Axial Spondyloarthritis Society

Clare Jacklin, Chief Executive, National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society

Dr Arash Angadji, Chief Executive, Orthopaedic Research UK

Heather Wallace, Chief Executive, Pain Concern

Dr Lucy Douglas, President, Primary Care Rheumatology and Musculoskeletal Medicine Society

Sharon Petford, Chair, RCN Rheumatology Nursing Forum

Dr Paul Chadwick, Clinical Director and Interim CEO, Royal College of Podiatry

Craig Jones, Chief Executive, Royal Osteoporosis Society

Sue Farrington, Chief Executive, Scleroderma and Raynaud's UK

Sally Steadman, Chief Executive, The Society of Sports Therapists

Lynsey Conway, Secretariat, UK Gout Society

Deborah Alsina, Chief Executive, Versus Arthritis