

PETITION

House of Assembly

ASKED BY: Ella Haddad MP

ANSWERED BY: Hon Bridget Archer MP, Minister for
Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing

QUESTION:

We, the undersigned citizens of Tasmania, draw to the attention of the House:

1. That one in four Tasmanians live with arthritis and related musculoskeletal conditions leading to significant inflammation and pain.
2. That Tasmanians living with arthritis deserve access to appropriate clinical services statewide but that those living in the North and North West are currently significantly disadvantaged in accessing appropriate care.
3. That the Liberal Government committed \$6 million in the 2023 State Budget for the establishment of Statewide Musculoskeletal (MSK) Services including the development of permanent Northern based Persistent Pain and Rheumatology services.
4. That despite this commitment, implementation progress has halted, and funding is reportedly no longer available. Instead, a handful of one-off outpatient clinics has been substituted, supplemented by telehealth services.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the House to:

1. Recognise the need of Northern and North Western Tasmanians to be able to access appropriate clinical care including treatment for arthritis and persistent pain.

2. Call upon the Government to deliver its 2023 Budget commitment to establish Statewide Musculoskeletal (MSK) services including the development of permanent Northern based rheumatology services and persistent pain clinics.

ANSWER:

The Government recognises and understands the importance of specialist services for people living with musculoskeletal conditions, including persistent pain, and we are committed to providing equitable access to these services for Tasmanians across the State.

We are working to increase access to musculoskeletal care pathways and implement multidisciplinary models of care, including strengthening of pain and rheumatology services in the North and North West of Tasmania.

The Department of Health is currently establishing:

- A permanent rheumatology service,
- A permanent back pain assessment and treatment service, and
- Enhanced persistent pain service capability, through extended partnership arrangements with private providers.

These initiatives will provide improved services for Tasmanians living in the North and North West of our State.

Recruitment is currently underway at the Launceston General Hospital to permanently appoint:

- Specialist Rheumatology Consultants,
- Advanced scope physiotherapists,
- A Clinical Nurse Consultant, and
- Administrative support.

This new rheumatology service will complement existing musculoskeletal care pathways, including:

- Orthopaedic and neurosurgical services, and
- Allied health-led non-surgical back pain and joint assessment and treatment.

In the interim, in response to identified need, the Department has already progressed improved persistent pain service capability, supported by a partnership with a private pain specialist service in Launceston and additional funding to the OPAL Persistent Pain Program in the North West.

Through the partnership with a Launceston private provider, we have expanded access for public patients, which includes:

- Consultant services for persistent pain management, provided by a Pain Medicine Specialist, and
- Access to minor procedures to support persistent pain management.

The Department has also purchased 3D scanning technology for orthotics and prosthetics in the North West, and podiatry F-Scan in shoe pressure fitting equipment for podiatry services state-wide.

Through continued private partnership agreements, expanded public specialist consultant outpatient persistent pain services will be delivered from Burnie, Devonport, and Launceston, to build service capability and further understand the current demand and unmet service need for future planning and development.

This expansion will further increase access for public patients by providing additional:

- Consultant services for persistent pain management, provided by a Pain Medicine Specialist,
- Multidisciplinary Assessments for people suffering from persistent pain, and

- Pain Management Programs that support self-management.

The cost of these services will be fully met from within the Department's budget.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bridget Archer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Hon Bridget Archer MP
Minister for Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing

Date: 6 October 2025