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MEDIA RELEASE

## **NEW REPORT LAYS BARE THE TRUE COST OF CHRONIC PAIN THAT IS SET TO SOAR**

***Experts call for immediate action as 3.24 million Australians struggle daily while falling through the gaps of a health system ill-equipped to address pain despite it costing the economy, and patients, billions***

- ***The personal burden extends beyond physical pain:*** Studies show close to 1.45 million Australians (45%) living with chronic pain also live with depression and anxiety. That number will rise to 2.3 million people by 2050.
- ***If the status quo remains, the number in pain will skyrocket:*** The number of Australians living with chronic pain is set to rise from 3.24 million to 5.23 million by 2050 (68.3% of which will be working age) if we don't act.
- ***Inaction will see the chronic pain price tag remain in the billions:*** Last year alone, Australians paid 2.7 billion in out of pocket expenses to manage their pain. As a nation, the annual cost will rise from \$139.3 billion in 2018 to an estimated \$215.6 billion by 2050.
- ***It's not too late, but urgent reform is needed now:*** Doubling access to multidisciplinary care and upskilling GPs are two cost effective options to address burgeoning issue of chronic pain and change lives.

**Canberra, 4 April 2019** – Painaustralia has today launched 'The cost of pain in Australia' report, exposing the significant burden chronic pain places on the lives of Australians, their back pocket, and the economy's bottom line. By pulling data out of the silos of health, aging and disability sectors, the report – prepared by Deloitte Access Economics - reflects a sobering picture of how chronic pain is crippling this nation, and makes clear that continued inaction is not an option.

Over three million Australians face a life cut short, struggling each day with the limitations chronic pain places on their lives. "Restricting the activities people can undertake, chronic pain can reduce a person's ability to work, disturb sleep and cause fatigue, and have a detrimental impact on relationships," said Associate Professor Malcolm Hogg, Head of Pain Services at Melbourne Health, and Painaustralia Director.

"This is why the impact of pain is so great, not just in dollar terms, but in lost potential, to contribute, to participate. The rising rate of deaths associated with prescription opioids is just one indicator that we aren't dealing with chronic pain well in this country," continued Associate Professor Hogg.

Inextricably linked to mental health, studies show close to 1.45 million Australians living with chronic pain also live with depression and anxiety. "This number is likely to rise to more than 2.3 million by the year 2050 if we don't act now. These are numbers which we simply can't ignore," said Painaustralia CEO, Carol Bennett.

The most comprehensive analysis of the financial impact of chronic pain in Australia to date, the report has pulled data out of the health, aging and disability sectors, to reveal the staggering cost of chronic pain to taxpayers. In 2018, this figure was \$139 billion. This was on top of the fact that last year alone, Australians paid \$2.7 billion in out of pocket expenses to manage their pain. Yet, this billion dollar price tag will only climb without significant change.

"Without genuine reform, quickly implemented, our research shows the cost of chronic pain will climb from \$139.3 billion today to \$215 billion by 2050, putting even more pressure on the back

pockets of patients and an already struggling health system that is ill-equipped to adequately manage chronic pain.

“It is my sincerest hope that this revealing and important evidence will compel national action in how we respond to pain. In a country like Australia, we must do better for the millions of people in pain. Anything less is unacceptable,” said Ms Bennett.

In exposing the individual and economic cost, the report identified that a lack of specialist care and GPs equipped to handle chronic pain meant patients were being overlooked, falling through the cracks in the health system and not receiving the multidisciplinary care considered the standard in pain management.

The report revealed that around one-fifth of all GP presentations in Australia involved chronic pain. Yet, referrals to pain specialists occurred in less than 15% of GP consultations where pain is managed.

While the figures released in today’s report are shocking, and a bleak picture has been painted, Painaustralia insists that the task of addressing chronic pain in Australia is not insurmountable if we focus on addressing issues at the coalface of care.

“There are changes we can put in place that can make a big difference to the lives of so many who live with chronic pain and help to improve how our health system manages pain,” explained Ms Bennett.

“Painaustralia’s National Action Plan has set out a clear path forward which can help to address these issues, in particular, supporting two potential interventions mapped out in our report that could not only save lives but be a sound economic investment for Government to make.”

With just 316 pain specialists across the country to treat the millions living in pain, only one in every 100 people with chronic pain receive the multidisciplinary care they need. Hence, one recommendation, that is supported by the National Action Plan, includes the roll-out of a pain specialist-designed and led national GP training program. At an estimated cost of \$45 million, the program could yield savings of \$209 million in overdose related costs alone.

“The problem of access to pain specialists is compounded further for Australians living in rural and remote areas who may wait years to see a pain specialist. Often a lack of support for time poor GPs can result in reliance on medication to treat a patient’s pain; this is especially so in rural and remote areas where opioid prescription is higher than urban areas of Australia, and access to multidisciplinary care is least.

“However, by providing GPs with the necessary expertise to adequately manage pain, we can help to ensure those living with chronic pain have access to the specific care they need to manage their pain, which can include pain education, physical and psychological methods that can optimise recovery and function of those with pain,” said Associate Professor Hogg.

Further to this, the report suggested that a doubling of access to multidisciplinary care at a cost of \$70 million a year, could help to save the nation approximately \$271 million through savings to the health system, absenteeism and overall improved wellbeing.

“Chronic pain can come in many forms with differing impacts on the physical and mental wellbeing of a patient. It is crucial that those in need have access to a range of healthcare professionals with the particular skillsets to meet each individual need,” said Associate Professor Hogg.

Painaustralia’s National Strategic Action Plan for Pain Management currently sits with the Government for review and consideration.

<b>CHRONIC PAIN IS A NATIONAL ISSUE</b> <i>A snapshot of the impact of chronic pain across Australia</i>	
Australian state or territory	Impact of chronic pain
<b>NSW</b>	More than 1 million living with chronic pain; predicted to rise to over 1.5 million by 2050.
<b>VIC</b>	Over 825,000 living with chronic pain; predicted to rise to over 1.3 million by 2050.
<b>QLD</b>	More than 645,000 living with chronic pain; predicted to rise to over 1.1 million by 2050.
<b>SA</b>	Over 238,000 living with chronic pain; predicted to rise to 320,000 by 2050.
<b>WA</b>	More than 341,000 living with chronic pain; predicted to rise to over 708,000 by 2050.
<b>TAS</b>	Over 73,000 living with chronic pain; predicted to rise to more than 87,000 by 2050.
<b>NT</b>	More than 28,000 residents living with chronic pain; predicted to rise to more than 47,000 by 2050.
<b>ACT</b>	Over 51,000 living with chronic pain; predicted to rise to more than 88,000 by 2050.

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*This media release has been distributed by opr Agency on behalf of Painaustralia.*

#### **MEDIA CONTACTS**

- **Emma Nunan** / [Emma@opragency.com.au](mailto:Emma@opragency.com.au) / **M:** 0421 429 584
- **Thomas Skinner** / [Thomas.Skinner@opragency.com.au](mailto:Thomas.Skinner@opragency.com.au) / **M:** 0451 147 528

#### **About 'The cost of pain in Australia' report**

Deloitte Access Economics was commissioned by Painaustralia to establish the local and Australia wide socioeconomic impact of pain, and to conduct a cost effectiveness analysis of two health interventions that could reduce the impact of pain on the health system in Australia. In this report, evidence has been presented to demonstrate the burden of chronic pain in Australia, including health system, productivity and carer costs, other financial costs and the loss of wellbeing.

#### **About Painaustralia**

Painaustralia is the national peak body working to improve the quality of life of people living with pain, their families and carers, and to minimise the social and economic burden of pain. Painaustralia represents the interests of a broad membership that includes health, medical, research and consumer organisations. Established in 2011, our focus is to work with governments, health professional and consumer bodies, funders, educational and research institutions, to facilitate implementation of the National Pain Strategy and its blueprint the National Strategic Action Plan for Pain Management.