

MEDIA RELEASE

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Pain and opioids on the rise in Australia

Pain is now a major issue in Australia overloading our health system, with 6.9 million Australians living with a musculoskeletal condition and opioid prescribing on the rise.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) latest report *Australia's health 2018*, released today by Minister for Health Greg Hunt, shows bodily pain is increasing, with 78-89% of Australians experiencing bodily pain in the previous four weeks, compared with 68% two years ago.

Chronic pain is the main characteristic of two of the eight most common chronic conditions we face – arthritis and back pain – and is related to several of the other leading chronic conditions identified in the report – namely cancer, mental health conditions and diabetes.

Looking at back pain alone, 16% of Australians reported having this condition in 2014-15 and it is a leading cause of reduced workforce participation.

According to the report, on an average day in our health system 406,000 visits are made to a GP. Given the latest GP data tell us that one in five consultations involve a patient with chronic pain, this suggests 81,200 Australians are visiting their GP every day for a pain-related issue.

Opioid prescribing rose by 24% between 2010-11 and 2014-15, from 369 to 456 prescriptions per 1,000 population, and pain management is one of two main reasons opioids are prescribed.

Painaustralia CEO Carol Bennett says the figures presented in the AIHW report are alarming and mean we can no longer afford to ignore the issue of pain in this country.

“The latest AIHW report highlights the seriousness of the pain burden in Australia and makes a clear case for investment and support to prevent and manage chronic pain conditions.

“Millions of Australians are affected by chronic pain and tens of thousands of us with pain are looking for help from our GPs every day.

“Opioid prescribing is on the rise despite their limitations in managing chronic pain – because many people have few alternatives.

“Pain is putting enormous pressure on our health system but this can be minimised with a strategic national plan that prioritises education and awareness for consumers and health professionals, and makes pain care accessible and affordable.

“We look forward to working with the Australian Government and our stakeholders to develop a national action plan for chronic pain management. It can't come soon enough.”

Minister Hunt recently announced funding for Painaustralia to develop a national action plan to address chronic pain.

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