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**Media release: 13 June 2019**

**Musculoskeletal conditions now the most costly disease group in Australia**

* *Musculoskeletal conditions, including arthritis, affect 7 million Australians*
* *The health system cost of these conditions was $12.5 billion in 2015-16, the highest cost of any disease group. This cost is up from $5.7 billion in 2008-09.*

‘We simply cannot continue to ignore the impact of conditions like arthritis and back pain,’ said Arthritis Australia CEO, Mr Andrew Mills, responding to a report today from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare showing musculoskeletal conditions now cost $12.5 billion a year, more than any other disease group.

‘The cost of these conditions has more than doubled in less than a decade and has now well and truly eclipsed the cost of cancer, cardiovascular disease and mental health conditions,’ said Mr Mills.

‘For too long musculoskeletal conditions have been trivialised and treated as the ‘poor cousins’ when it comes to investment in better programs and research,’ Mr Mills said, 'but this has to change unless we want to see the cost of managing these conditions become completely unsustainable in future.’

‘It is not just the financial cost that is so high, it is also the personal cost of living with this painful and disabling group of conditions,’ Mr Mills said, noting that musculoskeletal conditions are the leading cause by far of disability and early retirement due to ill-health in Australia.

Mr Mills highlighted that government investment in research for arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions through the National Health and Medical Research Council was just $17m in 2017. ‘This is just a fraction of the research investment in other disease groups and is completely out of proportion to the cost and burden of musculoskeletal conditions,’ he said.

The *National Strategic Action Plan for Arthritis* which was launched earlier this year outlines key priorities for preventing arthritis, investing in research and improving treatment and support for people living with the condition. Many of the recommendations have the potential to rein in the costs of treating arthritis, while improving quality of life for those affected.

‘The Federal Government has allocated $4 million towards the implementation of the Action Plan, which is very welcome, but much more needs to be done, at both the national and the state and territory level, and soon,’ Mr Mills said.

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***Table 1: Health system expenditure by disease group, 2015-16, top five disease groups***

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| **Disease group** | **Total expenditure**  **$billion** | **Percent of allocated expenditure (%)** |
| Musculoskeletal disorders | 12.5 | 10.7 |
| Cardiovascular diseases | 10.4 | 8.9 |
| Injuries | 8.9 | 7.6 |
| Mental and substance abuse disorders | 8.9 | 7.6 |
| Cancer | 8.4 | 7.2 |