



RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS IN NEW ZEALAND

What is rheumatoid arthritis?

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune disease that causes inflammation, pain and swelling in the joints. **Other immune system arthritis** conditions include ankylosing spondylitis, lupus and psoriatic arthritis. The recommendations below also apply to these conditions.

Who has rheumatoid arthritis?

In 2018 approximately 101,000 people in New Zealand had RA. It can occur at any age, but most often develops between 25 and 50. Women are 2 to 3 times more likely to have RA than men.

How rheumatoid arthritis impacts on individuals, whanau and society

This disease causes pain and reduced mobility associated with joint damage. Some people have flares when their joint symptoms are worse than at other times. Others develop extensive disability and inflammation in other parts of their body – such as eyes, skin, heart, lungs or nerves.

Deloitte has estimated the extent of disability arising from the main types of arthritis found that RA causes the most disability. People with RA have higher rates of depression than other people. Loss of appetite and poor sleep are also common for people with autoimmune conditions.

What solutions do we suggest?

Concerns about the shortage of publicly funded rheumatologists in New Zealand have been expressed since 2004. People are waiting for many months to see specialists in the public system. Which is serious for those with immune system disorders as early access to medicines slows the progress of their disease. This shortage is most serious in the regions.

Urgent action is needed to address the shortage of rheumatologists, but consideration also needs to be given to alternative options of providing clinical support (such as nurse specialists) so that more effective care can be offered to people with rheumatoid arthritis.

Questions to MPs:

- Will your Party commit to Improving access to rheumatology services throughout New Zealand?