

ARTHRITIS SOCIETY
MANITOBA 2021 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

Delivered to:

Minister of Finance Scott Fielding

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(<https://engagemb.ca/budget-2021>)

INTRODUCTION

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the Government of Manitoba Ministry of Finance 2021 pre-budget consultations.

The Arthritis Society is a national health charity that gives voice to the 6 million Canadians with arthritis – 1 in 5 of us, half of whom are seniors – including more than 210,000 Manitobans, and there is no cure. Arthritis is a collection of conditions affecting joints and other tissues, and it can cause excruciating pain, limit the ability to walk and move, interrupt sleep, and significantly diminish quality of life for patients.

Arthritis is the second most common chronic health condition in Manitoba (after back problems) and is also the leading cause of long-term disability in the country and can severely impact a person's ability to participate in the labour force.

As Canada continues to battle the COVID-19 pandemic, it is vital that we take steps to support the 210,000 Manitobans with arthritis, many of whom have encountered significant hardship during the crisis. In this context, the Arthritis Society respectfully provides the following recommendations for the 2021 Manitoba budget consultation:

- 1) Develop and implement a coordinated plan to address COVID-related backlog of joint replacement surgeries
- 2) Ensure access to a range of treatment options for Manitobans living with arthritis, including biologics, and
- 3) Stop the taxation of medical cannabis and enable its distribution through pharmacies.

1) Develop and implement a coordinated plan to address COVID-related backlog of joint replacement surgeries

As we continue to confront COVID-19, a new health challenge is emerging — an alarming backlog of joint replacement surgeries. Arthritis is the leading cause of joint replacement, including over 99% of knee replacements and over 80% of hip replacements. While Manitoba is performing better than some provinces, we are still not hitting the medically recommended target wait time of six months for joint replacement surgeries. According to the 2019 [Canadian Institute for Health Information](#) (CIHI) wait times data, in Manitoba only 46% knee replacements and 55% of hip replacements were completed within the medically recommended target of six months. As well, according to the CIHI data there is inconsistency across the province in meeting the targets, with some regions having a much lower percentage meeting the six-month target.

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly exacerbated this issue through the delay or cancellation of even more surgeries. We applaud the government for steps announced in January to address the surgical backlog, however, greater action is required and soon! Delaying surgery will unfortunately

lead to unnecessary pain and suffering for many Canadians who are prevented from contributing to their families, communities, and workplaces. There are also concerns about the downstream health impacts that increased wait times could have for arthritis patients waiting for joint replacement surgery, such as the increased use of opioids for pain relief. Surgery delays are not only devastating for individuals but can also lead to significant additional costs for the healthcare system due to the co-morbidities associated with the disease, including weight gain, diabetes, heart and circulatory issues, mental health conditions, and other compounding health challenges.

A typical knee or hip joint replacement surgery costs the health care system roughly \$11,000. With that investment, most patients can return to normal functioning, contributing to their families, communities, and workplaces. The short-term solution is to continue to invest to bring Manitoba up to standard through increasing volumes and supporting triage or assessment clinics that provide quicker patient assessment for joint replacement, especially in challenged regions. In the longer term, the province should seek innovative approaches to reduce the burden of surgery and develop and/or fund alternatives to prevent damage due to arthritis and regenerate joint tissues before joint replacement becomes necessary; for example, GLA:D programs, physiotherapy, nutrition and weight management programs.

The Arthritis Society is advocating federally, asking the Government of Canada to work with provinces and territories to address this urgent health crisis and to provide dedicated funding through an increase in the Canada Health Transfer to expand capacity for joint replacement surgeries. The Arthritis Society also convened an expert Working Group to explore how we can use the experience of COVID-19 and the move to virtual care to develop innovative approaches to reduce wait times and improve the patient experience.

We encourage you to talk to us at the Arthritis Society as you continue your positive steps to address wait times in Manitoba.

(2) Ensure access to a range of treatment options for Manitobans living with arthritis, including biologics

There is no cure for arthritis. Pharmacological treatments play an important role in management of the condition, which typically persists for many years, if not a lifetime. It is vital that there be a range of treatment options available, as people with arthritis respond differently to different treatments. In the case of inflammatory arthritis, for example, treatments are still very much trial and error: what works for one person may not for another; it is about finding the right treatment at the right time. A range of choices and solutions is therefore critical.

Arthritis Society believes that [biosimilars](#) have a role to play in the care and management of inflammatory arthritis. Biosimilars provide additional choices for those living with inflammatory arthritis and have the potential to lower health care costs and increase access to treatment. Public and prescriber education on biosimilars is important and should be supported by the government.

It is vital that key stakeholders, including patient groups, be actively engaged and involved in the development or changes to provincial drug programs or policies. The Arthritis Society is ready to work with government to ensure arthritis patients have access to the medicines they need.

(3) Stop the taxation of medical cannabis and expand access through pharmacy distribution

Many people with arthritis rely on medical cannabis for pain and symptom management; a Statistics Canada report showed that many of those cannabis users are seniors. Although cannabis for medical purposes is authorized by healthcare practitioners as a medicine, it is not treated as such in key aspects of policy around access and affordability.

Applying any tax to cannabis for medical purposes is inconsistent with the taxation of prescription drugs and medical necessities. We encourage you to remove the provincial sales tax for medical cannabis.

Expanding access points by enabling the distribution of medical cannabis through pharmacies will help to ensure that patients receive reliable education on safe and effective use from trained healthcare professionals. This will also help facilitate reimbursement by health insurance plans.

CLOSING

In closing, we urge the Manitoba Government to consider our three key recommendations that can help keep Manitobans with arthritis moving and healthy – reducing the cost to the healthcare system today and tomorrow. We would welcome the opportunity to elaborate on these recommendations by providing oral testimony before the Legislature and/or finance committee.

Sincerely,



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About the Arthritis Society

The Arthritis Society is Canada's largest charitable source of investment in cutting-edge arthritis research, and a leader in proactive advocacy, education and support towards delivering better health outcomes for people affected by arthritis. Safety and improved care are our top priorities, with our advocacy focused on improving access to care, timeliness of care, and innovative research. The Arthritis Society is accredited under Imagine Canada's Standards Program.