

Dear Editor:

The Public Health Agency of Canada recently reported (*Life with Arthritis in Canada: A personal and public health challenge, July 2010*) that nearly 40% of the 4.2 million Canadians living with the disease endure daily physical activity and work limiting pain, particularly those aged 15 to 44 years of age; people in the prime of their education and working lives.

Pain is the hallmark symptom of the over 100 different types of arthritis, and is primary in the constellation of symptoms that make the disease one of the most costly to Canada's health care system. Based on its prevalence, arthritis ranks well above diabetes, heart disease and cancer as a national health issue, and the total economic burden of the group of diseases will cost Canada \$6.4 billion in 2010.

Given these staggering statistics, it is imperative that Federal and Provincial governments work together to develop a national framework for dealing with the growing problem of arthritis.

Perhaps no other group of Canadians knows best the discrimination Dr. Michael Cousins referred to than those living with arthritis. Family doctors receive so little training in musculoskeletal diseases in Canadian medical schools (on average 17 hours) that diagnostic delay, sometimes for months or years, is not surprising. Provincial Pharmacare programs take many months, and sometimes years, to provide financial reimbursement for Health Canada-approved arthritis medications, ones proved through rigorous science to prevent pain, joint and internal organ damage and permanent disability; even death.

Most importantly, governments, non-governmental organizations, employers and the private sector must support public awareness programs such as the [National Arthritis Awareness Program](#) to make Canadians aware that there are primary and secondary prevention strategies that will help them prevent or limit pain in their daily lives.

Sincerely,

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Dr. John Esdaile, Scientific Director, Arthritis Research Centre of Canada, University of British Columbia

(Co-leaders, [Arthritis is cured! \(if you want it\)](#) National Arthritis Awareness Program)