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New Data Uncovers Australia's Back Pain Crisis: Spinal Health Week Champions WHO Guideline for Condition Impacting 8.35M Households

Today, the Australian Chiropractors Association (ACA) launched national **Spinal Health Week (20 - 26 May 2024)** with the release of new independent findings on the prevalence of back pain due to spine related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs).

The Impact of Back Pain & Musculoskeletal Injuries in Australia - An independent national consumer survey conducted by Pureprofile, of 1006 respondents, the survey revealed that 98% of the 907 respondents with a back related MSD (98.5% of women and 98.0% of men) experienced back pain in the past 12 months.

According to the ABS (Oct 2023), in June 2023, Australia had 10.4 million households. With over 80% of survey respondents reporting that their household had occupants who experienced back pain, this figure suggests that 8.35 million Australian households are likely to have residents who suffer back pain.

Dr David Cahill, President of the ACA said, "Currently the annual cost of MSDs to the Australian economy exceeds \$55.1 billion in direct health costs, lost productivity, reduced quality of life and increased disability. With growth in MSD cases projected to be 43% over the next two decades, the burden of MSDs and back pain on Australians and our economy is and will continue to be a substantial liability."

"Together with the World Health Organisation's (WHO) analysis that MSDs account for the greatest proportion of persistent pain conditions and are the second largest contributor to disability worldwide with low back pain the single leading cause of disability globally; the survey results form a compelling case for a proactive, strategic response to how Australians approach back pain," he said.

According to the survey, 6,368 MSDs were reported. The dominant three MSDs impacting the lives of Australian's were low back pain (80.6%), neck pain (67.9%) and mid back pain (66.3%). 75% of respondents aged 18-60 within the peak working age reported back pain with 17.9% of MSDs requiring workers compensation.

93.2% of all workers who 'sit AND stand' reported a musculoskeletal condition followed by 92.7% of workers who have a job which combines sitting, standing and physical work.

Workers undertaking repetitive movements and standing for prolonged periods of time reported the highest incidences of back pain and 94.6% of casual workers reported experiencing back pain.

For those who experience persistent symptoms beyond three months, the pain is often not caused by any particular condition. Known as 'Chronic Primary Low Back Pain' (CPLBP) or non-specific low back pain, it is classified as a non-sinister, non-pathological cause.

Of all respondents, 30% reported low back pain as the most chronic (long-lasting) MSD condition. 28% reported experiencing moderate low back pain which interfered significantly with daily life, while 35% of low back pain sufferers classified the pain as moderate and 8% said it was severe.

The implications of unresolved back pain can be debilitating, restricting sufferers' ability to participate in family, social, and work activities while having a negative impact on their mental health and overall wellbeing and placing a substantial financial burden on families, communities, and our healthcare system.

The *World Health Organisation (WHO) guideline for non-surgical management of chronic primary low back pain in adults in primary and community care settings (Dec 2023)*, developed from in depth research by a world-wide range of neuro-musculoskeletal health practitioners including chiropractors; recommends optimising the clinical management of people with CPLBP as a priority for WHO Member States.

“The personal cost to sufferers of persistent low back pain can be life-limiting so its vital sufferers seek appropriate healthcare options that not only limit the use of medications but treat the cause of their condition and help to prevent reoccurrence including through recommending exercise,” said Dr Cahill.

The survey results reflect the importance of exercise in prevention with 77% of respondents with a highly-active lifestyle outside work and who undertook daily exercise reporting the lowest prevalence of back pain.

Those most at risk of MSDs and low back pain include those who do strenuous physical work including lifting and repetitive actions such as bending, squatting or standing for extended periods, while inactive Australians who don’t exercise and spend long hours sitting at work or at home are also at risk of developing musculoskeletal problems that can impact their quality of life and overall health and wellbeing.

With the survey showing 97% of 61 to 70 year-olds and 87% of 71-plus year-olds reporting an MSD, older Australians are at greater risk of disability as they’re more likely to develop chronic low back pain which if left untreated, can lead to loss of physical and mental capacity and restricted mobility limiting participation in society with psychosocial impacts.

Of concern, the survey showed that a large number (50%) of MSD sufferers failed to seek a medical diagnosis and 64% of low back pain sufferers also reported not seeking a diagnosis, suggesting that official data may not reflect the true prevalence of MSDs and back pain in Australia.

Instead, 81% of low back pain sufferers opted to treat the symptoms with over the counter or prescription medications rather than seek treatment, with 13% using pain relief medications daily, 12% using it frequently (3+ days per week) and 12% taking pain relief medications often (one to two times per week).

Significantly, women reported the greatest use of pain relief medication for low back pain (82.2%) with 14% taking it daily, 13% frequently and 13.5% said they used medication to relieve back pain often.

“Although the WHO research determined that in some cases, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications may assist sufferers in some instances in the short-term; in line with the University of Sydney’s study (*Lancet medical journal*, 23 June 2023), the WHO recommends against the commonly prescribed use of opioids and paracetamol to treat low back pain as these medications have proven largely ineffective and come with a range of significant associated risks and side effects,” said Dr Cahill.

“With its findings focussed on individualised holistic healthcare, the WHO’s research aligns with the heart of ACA’s chiropractic philosophy - that patient education and self-care strategies, tailored exercise programs and physical therapies including chiropractic spinal manipulative therapy, and massage; can provide effective, evidence-based holistic drug-free solutions for back pain sufferers,” he said.

With 44% of all respondents and 43% of MSD sufferers reporting having consulted a chiropractor, 80% of those reported gaining relief, 41% reported their back pain either significantly improved or totally resolved and 18% reported a partial improvement through chiropractic healthcare.

The survey also showed that 81% of female and 79% of male respondents reported relief from back pain when consulting a chiropractor.

“With over 400,000 chiropractic healthcare consultations helping to create well-adjusted Australians every week, ACA chiropractors continue to play an important role in improving the spinal health of everyday Australians,” said Dr Cahill.

With prevention the best protection from back pain, people can download the free *Back Pain Factsheet*, the *Sitting, Standing, Lifting/Bending Factsheets*, the *Back Pain Checklist* and *Stretching Poster* and the *Straighten Up app* from www.spinalhealthweek.org.au.

#SpinalHealthWeek #ConsultAChiro #LowBackPain #BackPainConsultAChiro #BackPain

-ENDS-

INTERVIEW REQUESTS

A variety of spokespersons including case studies are available for interview.

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For information on **Spinal Health Week 2024** visit spinalhealthweek.org.au or call ACA on **02 8844 0400**

FOR IMAGES, VISION OR GRAPHICS, VISIT MEDIA CENTRE - SPINAL HEALTH WEEK 2024

<https://bit.ly/SHW-24>

EMBARGOED REPORT: <https://bit.ly/SHW-Impact-of-Back-Pain>

THE IMPACT OF BACK PAIN & MUSCULOSKELETAL INJURIES IN AUSTRALIA

An Independent National Consumer Survey Conducted By Pureprofile

1006 Respondents 506 Female 499 Male 1 Non-Binary

907 Reported a MSD to their spine/back in their lifetime: 462 Female; 444 Male; 1 Non-Binary

891 Experienced a MSD during past 12 months: 455 Female; 435 Male; 1 Non-Binary

854 Reported “low, mid, upper or non-specific” back pain: 437 Female; 416 Male; 1 Non-Binary

- 90.2% of respondents reported experiencing specific back/spine related MSD in their lifetime. 91.3% of female respondents and 89.0% of male respondents.
 - 98.2% of all back/spine related MSD sufferers experienced a back related MSD pain/injury during past 12 months (98.5% of female and 98.0% male).
 - 50.4% of all MSD Sufferers have never sought a medical diagnosis for their back pain.
 - 6,368 individual MSDs were reported by 907 of 1006 respondents.
 - 51.5% of all respondents experienced 7-12 MSDs. 61% of female and 47.1% of male respondents.
- 88.6% of total respondents experienced a back related MSD pain/injury during past 12 months (89.9% of female and 87.2% male).
- 80.3% of respondents reported that their households have occupants who experience back pain.
 - 65.9% reported themselves, 28.6% reported their partner, 6% their children and 6.3% a flatmate and 19.7% reported “no one in my household”.
 - According to the ABS (Oct 2023), Australia had 10.4million households in June 2023 indicating 8.35m Australian households are likely to have occupants who experience back pain.
- 85% of respondents reported experiencing “back pain – low, mid, upper or ‘non-specific’”.
 - 86% of female respondents experienced low, mid, upper or ‘non-specific’ back pain.
 - 83% of male respondents experienced low, mid, upper or ‘non-specific’ back pain.
 - According to the ABS (April 2024), Australia’s adult population at 30 June 2023 was 19.62 million indicating that approximately 16.4 million Australians could experience back pain (low, mid, upper or non-specific).
- Only 40% of low-back pain sufferers received a medical diagnosis – 42% of men and 39% of women. 60% of low-back pain sufferers have not sought a medical diagnosis.
- 75% of respondents with back pain are aged 18-60 which represents the peak working age.
- Of the respondents who reported experiencing low, mid, upper or non-specific back pain, ‘low-back pain’ was the most prevalent (80.6%) with 82.2% of all female respondents and 79% of all males suffering low-back pain.
- The top three MSDs reported were Low-back pain (80.6%), Neck pain (67.9%) and Mid-back pain (66.3%).

- Over the past 12 months:
 - **82% of women experienced low-back pain** with 28% of sufferers experiencing low-back pain weekly, 12% daily, 18% monthly, 15% occasionally (one every few months) and 15% seldom.
 - **78% of men experienced low-back pain** with 21% of sufferers experiencing it weekly, 14% daily, 17% monthly, 16% occasionally (one every few months) and 17% seldom.
- **Individuals** with a highly-active lifestyle outside work who undertook daily exercise reported the lowest prevalence of back pain (77%) compared to 86% of individuals who are only 'somewhat active' undertaking light physical activity (mix of standing and walking).
 - **Women** with a highly-active lifestyle outside work who undertook daily exercise reported the lowest prevalence of back pain (76%) compared to 87.4% of women who were 'somewhat active' and undertook only light physical activity - a mix of standing and walking.
 - **Men** with an 'active lifestyle' (undertake physically exertive activities; on their feet most of the day) reported the greatest prevalence of back pain (85%) with men with a 'highly-active' lifestyle having the lowest prevalence (78%).
- The data suggests weight can influence the likelihood of experiencing back pain with **95% of very overweight** and **90% of underweight** respondents suffering back pain compared to **81% of "ideal" weight** respondents and 86% of "bit over weight".
- 23% of low-back pain sufferers required time off work, 53% required treatment and 6% were no longer able to work.
- 28% of LB pain lasts for 1-3 days with 19% of sufferers experiencing ongoing pain.
- **81% of low-back pain sufferers take pain relief medication to manage their symptoms. Of those, 13% take pain relief medication on a daily basis, while 12% use it frequently (3+ days per week).**
- **28% of all respondents (285) reported experiencing moderate low-back pain, pain which interferes significantly with daily life with 35% of low-back pain sufferers classifying the pain as moderate and 8% as severe.**
- **93.2% of all workers who "sit AND stand"** reported a musculoskeletal condition followed by 92.7% of workers who have a job which combines "sitting, standing and physical work".
- **95.5% of Female workers** engaged in occupations that involve a combination of sitting and standing reported the highest prevalence of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs).
- **86.9% of workers who "stand"** have a greater prevalence of back pain, even when combined with sitting or physical work.
- **Workers undertaking repetitive movements and standing for prolonged periods** of time reported highest incidence of back pain:
 - **Female workers in sedentary occupations exhibited the highest prevalence of back pain at 89.1%**, whereas women engaged in highly active roles reported a lower prevalence of 83.3%.
 - 58.2% of Back Pain sufferers indicated work contributed to their back pain.
 - 56.1% of Back Pain sufferers indicated home contributed to their back pain.
- **17.9% of MSDs reported required workers compensation.**
- **Chronic Pain**
 - **30% of back pain (low, mid, upper or non-specific) sufferers reported their back pain became chronic (persisting for greater than 3 months or constantly recurring).**
 - **18% of total respondents classified their MSD as chronic.**
 - **Low-back pain was the most reported chronic condition reported by all respondents (37%).**
- 33.7% of all reported MSDs affected respondents' movement or their ability to carry out daily activities.
- The survey highlighted that community understanding of what constitutes "back pain or discomfort to muscles, ligament, tendons, joints, spine and/or bone" is lacking. When initially asked if the respondent had experienced back pain or discomfort to their muscles, ligaments, tendons, joints, spine or bones, only 66% of respondents answered yes. But when asked if they had experienced 12 specific types of back pain or injuries, 90% answered that they had in fact experienced back pain or discomfort to their muscles, ligaments, tendons, joints, spine or bones.

Chiropractic: Key Findings

- ⦿ **44% of all respondents (441) and 43% of MSD sufferers (426) reported consulting a chiropractor.**
- ⦿ 80.3% of patients reported gaining relief when they consulted a chiropractor. 10.2% noted minimal improvement and 9.5% saw no improvement.
- ⦿ 41% reported their back pain either significantly improved or totally resolved through chiropractic healthcare. 18% reported a partial improvement.
- ⦿ **81% of female patients reported relief when consulting a chiropractor for back pain.**
- ⦿ **79% of male patients reported relief when consulting a chiropractor for back pain.**

DOWNLOAD EMBARGOED REPORT: <https://bit.ly/SHW-Impact-of-Back-Pain>

NATIONAL SPINAL HEALTH WEEK 2024

National Spinal Health Week (20-26 May 2024) is the initiative of the Australian Chiropractors Association (ACA). ACA has conducted national Spinal Health Week for more than 25 years. It is Australia's longest running, and award-winning national health awareness campaign dedicated to improving the spinal health of Australians of all ages.

Annually, the national campaign focusses on a specific spinal health issue while promoting the importance of maintaining good spinal health to improve overall health and wellbeing. In 2024, the campaign focusses on improving musculoskeletal health to address back pain and the impact it has on 4 in every 5 Australians. ACA is encouraging individuals, the community, businesses and organisations to participate by registering at www.spinalhealthweek.org.au

With the cost of Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs) to the Australian economy exceeding \$55.1 billion annually (including direct health costs, lost productivity and reduced quality of life); with 6.1 million Australians already affected, of which 58% are of working age in peak income earning years (25-64); and, with the growth in musculoskeletal cases projected to be 43% over the next two decades (including older Australians living with spinal health conditions), the health burden on Australians and our economy is significant. By promoting a pro-active approach to improving spinal health through effective drug-free solutions, national Spinal Health Week 2024 will increase awareness of MSDs that can cause back pain and restrict the quality of life and increase the psychological distress and bodily pain of sufferers.

THE AUSTRALIAN CHIROPRACTORS ASSOCIATION

Established in 1938, the Australian Chiropractors Association (ACA) is the peak body representing chiropractors. The ACA promotes the importance of maintaining spinal health to improve musculoskeletal health through non-invasive, drug-free spinal health and lifestyle advice to help Australians of all ages lead and maintain healthy lives.

The ACA is the premier association for chiropractic in Australia. With around 3,000 members, the ACA is Australia's largest chiropractic health body and has taken a leadership role in promoting the importance of maintaining a healthy spine to improve the overall health and wellbeing of every Australian. ACA develops and promotes professional standards for chiropractors, has invested \$2.2 million to advance research in musculoskeletal health, builds evidence-based practice for chiropractic healthcare and actively promotes the importance of spinal health through its annual flagship campaign, national Spinal Health Week.

Every week 400,000 chiropractic healthcare consultations are creating well-adjusted Australians. With so many Australians visiting a chiropractor every week, chiropractors play an important role in improving the spinal health of everyday Australians.

ACA MEDIA SPOKESPERSONS - NATIONAL & ALL STATES & TERRITORIES

Note: Case studies are also available on request.

Dr David Cahill – President, Australian Chiropractors Association - National, NSW & Victoria

ACA President, Dr David Cahill has been a registered, practicing chiropractor since 1991, in the Malvern East area since 1998. He loves helping people of all ages, from newborn babies and toddlers, to those in their more senior years. David has always been very active in post-graduate education, continually upskilling in many aspects of chiropractic. From 2016 to 2020 David was also the chiropractor for the Hawthorn Football Club. He enjoys taking care of the elite footballers, integrating his chiropractic care in a team with the other support disciplines, particularly physiotherapy. David's passion is to truly help people have transformative experiences through chiropractic, and to better explore their magnificent potential.

Dr Damian Kristof – Vice President, Australian Chiropractors Association - National, NSW & Victoria

Nutritionist, Naturopath and Chiropractor, Dr Damian Kristof is a highly sought-after presenter and speaker in the Wellness industry. With over 20 years of experience, Damian's in-depth knowledge of the body, nervous system, food functions and responses coupled with his friendly and dynamic presenting style, has him in high demand. Focusing on food as key to unlocking optimal health and wellness, Damian presents in-depth facts and concepts that have never before been readily available to the public - offering all audiences from industry experts to the general public highly valuable content as he engages, educates and inspires audiences across the globe.

Dr Anthony Coxon – National & Victoria

Dr Anthony Coxon is a caring and respected chiropractor with 30 years' experience. In 2009, he completed Post Doctorate studies in Chiropractic Neurorehabilitation. This additional qualification gives Anthony skills in dealing with more complex cases, particularly patients that experience balance disorders and dizziness. He is the current Vice President of the Australian Chiropractors Association (ACA). In addition to running a busy practice, Anthony has also appeared on countless print, radio and television media spots including 'A Current Affair', 'Today Tonight', the 'Today Show' and the Evening news on all commercial television stations. Anthony sees daily how chiropractic care and a healthy lifestyle can bring vitality and wellbeing to his patients.

Dr Michelle Ronan - Victoria

Michelle has been a registered chiropractor since graduating from RMIT in 2005 and has practiced in the Albert Park area since 2010. Michelle's passion lies in helping people's bodies perform better to allow them to get more out of life, whether that be to enhance sports performance, rehabilitation of chronic conditions, during pregnancy or to support general health and wellbeing. Michelle loves helping people of all ages and stages of life on their health journey. Michelle previously sat on the Victorian branch of the CAA (now the Australian Chiropractors Association) and is currently completing a masters through RMIT.

Dr Kim Lie Jom – NSW

Dr Kim Lie Jom is a caring, dynamic and talented chiropractor with over 20 years' experience that has earned the respect and trust of his professional colleagues and patients alike. Kim's knowledge of chiropractic grew as did his interest within the profession. Paediatric chiropractic, sports chiropractic and the concept of wellness chiropractic are of particular interest to him. With three young children of his own he is very aware of how making healthy lifestyle choices from a young age will serve you later in life. He is passionate about chiropractic and feels that the profession has enormous health benefits to offer the community at large and his goal is to educate and adjust as many families as possible toward optimal health through natural chiropractic care.

Dr Billy Chow – South Australia

Dr Billy Chow graduated as a chiropractor from RMIT University in 1998. Since graduating he has had a varied and enriching career in private practice, on boards and in business. Dr Chow is passionate about educating and inspiring people to make better choices and to live happier and healthier lives. Dr Chow believes that being on the Spinal Research Board is an honour and allows him to give back to his profession through service and provides him an avenue to promote, fund and facilitate more research faster for the chiropractic profession.

Dr Ashley Dent – Tasmania

Dr Dent graduated from Macquarie University in Sydney in 2010 where he was awarded the Ed Devereaux Award for Services to the Student Body. He is active within the Australian Chiropractors Association at a state and national level chairing the public engagement committee and being a member of two other committees. He volunteers his time with St Vincent de Paul to bring chiropractic care to the homeless and vulnerable in Hobart. Dr Dent has a keen passion for helping people improve their long standing (chronic) back and neck pain and then progressing their spinal health through exercise and rehabilitation so that they are stronger and healthier than they've ever been.

Dr Adam Smith – Queensland

Dr Adam Smith (Chiropractor) has nearly 20 years' experience in family based chiropractic care. He has experience working in many communities around Australia and internationally, including regularly serving on committees that guide health policy on a state and Australian federal level, as well as in the UK.

With a special interest in family health and wellness, Dr Adam works with local community groups, charities, workplaces and schools to improve access to chiropractic care for those who want it. He believes that all Australians should have access to quality chiropractic services, so he is currently working with a group that is expanding chiropractic access in regional and rural areas of Australia across six states and territories.

Dr Joshua Tymms – Western Australia

Dr Joshua Tymms discovered chiropractic as a child and has been fascinated with its application ever since. He graduated from Murdoch University with a Double Degree in 2006 and is registered as a chiropractor. He finished his International Chiropractic Sports Science Diploma in 2007 and has worked at many international level sports events. He is studying a double masters in public health and business administration to help build skills in these areas.

Dr Ali Young – Western Australia

Dr Ali Young is a Chiropractor with over 20 years' experience working specifically with families, children and women. She has owned practices & worked in both Western Australia and Queensland, and loves taking care of those children that love that extra jolt of frivolity, playfulness and joy in their healthcare. She is an advocate for Working Mothers, with her book, Work. Mama. Life widely received upon its publication in 2022. She is a mother of two, and now works with women in her Holistic Health Business space, combining these two great loves with her chiropractic work. She is a sought after speaker, MC, and strategist for working mothers in the allied health space who both own businesses, & want to live large whilst avoiding burnout. She has written for most major newspapers around Australia, has a podcast "Work Mama Life" with nearly 20,000 downloads, and provides support in the online space for women and mothers. She has been a chiropractic patient since 15 years of age, and thinks there is no greater gift than providing the support families need to allow their health to shine.

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