

70 PER CENT OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH CHRONIC PAIN CUTTING BACK ON FOOD AND FUEL TO PAY FOR CARE

****Case studies available at request****

Survey reveals concerning issues of affordability, accessibility, and awareness experienced by Australians living with chronic pain

A new survey of 1500 people living with chronic pain by not-for-profit Chronic Pain Australia reveals that respondents are cutting back on food for their households in order to afford medications and health specialists, with 70% saying they had gone without these essentials in order to continue managing their chronic pain.

In many cases, respondents were prioritising maintaining their private health cover over other essentials. 65% of survey respondents with private health insurance are also cutting back on food and fuel as a result of the costs associated with managing their condition.

More than half of respondents are paying \$200 or more a month out of pocket to see medical specialists for their pain condition, but this is a burden that not all respondents could manage - 55% of survey respondents say they had been unable to see specialist health practitioners over the past twelve months due to cost.

Accessibility is also a major issue confronting people living with chronic pain. While cost tops the list of reasons why people living with chronic pain struggle to obtain care, a third (33%) said transport was a challenge, while nearly a fifth (19%) struggled to get time off work. Lack of awareness of where to turn for help was also a major barrier, with 61% of respondents saying that they didn't know who they should see about their condition.

A large number of respondents (82%) believe their GP should be more aware of and open-minded to the full spectrum of treatment options available for managing chronic pain.

When the treatments they receive are limited or inadequate, many respondents reported attempting to manage their condition on their own. If professionally prescribed treatment options are inaccessible or unaffordable, a proportion of people living with chronic pain turn to unmonitored treatments, including alcohol (48%), cigarettes (28%), and non-medicinal cannabis (26%).

This raises further concerns for some of the 3.6 million Australians who are self medicating to manage their chronic pain due to the unaffordability and access issues for treatment. Many may also experience side effects and setbacks that can lead to hospitalisations, as the cost of living rises, creating more of a burden for society and the individual.



Fiona Hodson, President of Chronic Pain Australia, says that the lack of public and professional awareness around chronic pain continues to create barriers to access affordable and evidenced based pain management approaches.

“As the cost of living rises, many of the 3.6 million Australians living with chronic pain may experience shortfalls and setbacks in their chronic pain management,” Ms Hodson says.

“Health services and treatments options which are inaccessible due to remoteness and also unaffordable for many, can force people living with chronic pain to seek out unsafe ways to manage and cope with their pain. Many don’t feel like they have a choice,” Ms Hodson says.

“This issue is only going to become more acute as people living with chronic pain struggle to afford the holistic professional care they need and are forced to increasingly rely on medication or medication substitutes.

“It is important that there is greater awareness, affordability and accessibility to assist people living with chronic pain.

“People living with chronic pain deserve Triple AAA standards of care.”

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National Pain Survey 2022 report is attached. More findings are summarised overleaf.

Key figures from the 2022 National Pain Week Survey (more quotes and detail in attached report):

The majority of people first turn to their GP when looking for advice on their chronic pain condition.

- 50% said their general practitioner is their most important source of information.
- In the age of advancing technology, only 5% are turning to social media as their most important information source

The stigma associated with chronic pain continues to be considerable.

- Over half of people with chronic pain (54%) feel stigmatised by people in the greater community
- A quarter of people with chronic pain feel stigmatised by their work colleagues.
- Over half of people with chronic pain (52.62%) feel stigmatised by their family, and 43% feel stigmatised by their friends
- Nearly 45% of people with chronic pain feel stigmatised by their general practitioner

Empathy and validation were essential to survey respondents, but above all, they want their GPs to be open-minded about treatment options.

- 82% of people believe that their general practitioner should be open-minded about treatment options to manage their chronic pain better
- 66% of people believe their general practitioner should listen with empathy to manage their chronic pain better

Despite more than half of the respondents having private health insurance, many still struggle to afford the cost of chronic pain management.

- 65% of people with private health insurance said they went without food so they can afford medicines and other healthcare management

Managing chronic pain places a considerable financial strain on people. There are not enough financially viable options for people living with chronic pain.

- On average, 52% said they paid at least \$200 per month for medical specialists
- On average, 45% said they paid at least \$200 per month for allied health professionals



Non-prescription means of managing chronic pain remain prevalent.

- Nearly half (48%) of the respondents say they use alcohol to manage their chronic pain.
- 28% use cigarettes to assist with chronic pain management

About National Pain Week 2022

National Pain Week 2022 is Australia's annual awareness event for Chronic Pain.

National Pain Week takes place in the last week of July each year. In 2022 it will take place from 25th – 31st July 2022. We want to draw attention to the plight of people experiencing chronic pain and, by doing so, reduce the social and other barriers related to living with chronic pain. This year's theme is 'Triple AAA', which stands for Awareness, Accessibility, and Affordability, which all Australians should have access to.