

## **Arthritis Consumer Experts Letter to the Editor/Op-Ed**

### **Re: Make Arthritis a Priority in Ontario's 2025 Election**

While economic concerns, such as the impact of U.S. tariffs, dominate the headlines this election season, health care remains a top priority for Ontarians. It is an issue that touches every household and consistently ranks as one of the most important concerns for voters. Among the many health challenges facing Ontario, arthritis stands out as one of the most pressing chronic disease issues, affecting more than 2.3 million residents—or one in six voters. Despite its prevalence and profound impact, arthritis often remains overlooked in health care planning and policy discussions.

Access to arthritis care in Ontario is uneven, especially for those in rural and remote areas. Inflammatory arthritis conditions like rheumatoid arthritis, axial spondyloarthritis, psoriatic arthritis, and lupus require timely diagnosis, quick access to rheumatologists, and appropriate medication coverage. Unfortunately, Ontario's current system falls short.

People with arthritis often face delays due to restrictive Ontario Drug Benefit reimbursement criteria, which mandate failing older, less effective treatments before gaining access to advanced therapies. These unnecessary delays can lead to irreversible joint damage and diminished quality of life.

Indigenous Peoples in Ontario face even greater barriers. With some of the highest rates of life-threatening arthritis globally, Indigenous communities require culturally appropriate, patient-centered policies that address their unique health care needs. Models that incorporate community-based patient care facilitators have proven effective, yet they remain underutilized.

There are clear, actionable steps the next Ontario government can take:

#### ***Sustain and expand successful models of arthritis care***

*The Advanced Clinical Practitioner in Arthritis Care Project has shown promising results in Northern Ontario through its "hub-and-spoke" model. Continued funding and expansion of this project can ensure more Ontarians receive timely, specialized care.*

### ***Modernize drug reimbursement policies***

*Reforming the Ontario Drug Benefit Program to make access criteria less restrictive will reduce delays in receiving advanced therapies, offering patients the right treatment at the right time.*

### ***Reinvest biosimilars savings***

*Ontario could save more than \$200 million annually through biosimilar transition policies. These savings should be reinvested to expand coverage for new drugs and access to existing medicines for people living with inflammatory arthritis.*

### ***Invest in Indigenous health***

*Introducing culturally relevant, community-based care models can bridge existing gaps and improve health outcomes for Indigenous populations disproportionately affected by arthritis.*

### ***Enhance virtual care***

*While virtual care has improved access for many, disparities remain, particularly for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour. The government must ensure virtual care is equitable and accessible to all Ontarians.*

Arthritis may not dominate headlines, but its impact is profound and far-reaching. Most Ontario political parties and candidates acknowledge both the direct health care costs and indirect economic burdens of arthritis through lost employment and absenteeism. In 2025, it's time for Ontario's political leaders to prioritize arthritis care. Ontarians living with arthritis deserve a health care system that meets their needs, regardless of where they live or who they are.

On February 27, 2025, make your voice count. [#Vote4Arthritis](#) and demand meaningful change for the millions of Ontarians affected by this debilitating disease.

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