THE ARTHRITIS MAP OF VICTORIA

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Background

Arthritis and musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions are the most common chronic conditions in
Australia and are the leading cause of long-term disability.1 In 2007, the total cost of arthritis to the
Australian economy was estimated to be $23.9 billion, an increase of more than $4.0 billion on the
cost calculated in 2004.2 Timely access to appropriate programs and services to both manage and
prevent these conditions is vital.

The Arthritis Map of Victoria is a practical, interactive online tool that aims to help address the
increasing impact of arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions in communities across the state
of Victoria. It was launched during Arthritis Awareness Week in March 2011. The map assists
Victorians to prevent or manage chronic MSK conditions by helping them to locate the programs
and services they need. The Map also equips Victorian’s to find their way through the complex
health, disability and community service systems, a significant issue experienced by people with
arthritis and other MSK conditions, and help them to better manage their health and wellbeing.

Two maps within one website

When Arthritis Victoria (AV) began collating data for the map during 2010, we realised there was
much we wanted to display but we didn’t want to threaten the maps accessibility for consumers. For
this reason, AV created two separate versions of the map which could be accessed via the one
website; The Consumer and Health Professional Map and the Health Planning map.

The Consumer and Health Professional Map displays the latest information on the prevalence of
musculoskeletal conditions, such as arthritis and osteoporosis, across Victoria. This map also
displays information on local services relevant to people with a MSK and their health professionals,
such as rheumatologists, health service providers, physical activity classes, support groups, and park
and recreation facilities. This map contains a smaller amount of data than the Health Planning
version but all is likely to be relevant to assist consumers (and their health professionals) to improve
their day-to-day management of their condition.

The Health Planning version of the map is designed to assist policymakers, service providers and
researchers with state-wide and localised health service planning by highlighting areas where
important programs and services are not currently available. In addition to the data contained on the
Consumer and Health Professional Map, the Health Planning map includes hospital admissions
data, socio-economic indexes, projected population rates, urban growth boundaries and a range of
other data to facilitate planning.

The map has been developed in conjunction with online mapping experts ‘dMap’, who specialise in
mapping platforms built on the Google Maps engine. The use of this technology will allow people
to find and locate relevant services in their local area, as well as allow them to better understand the
impact of arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions on their local communities. The Google Maps
platform also enables consumers and health professionals to quickly locate services and instantly
retrieve printable door-to-door directions.
User feedback

Since the launch of the Map, AV has received positive feedback from a wide range of consumers, health professionals and stakeholders who overwhelmingly report that the map is a user-friendly educational resource for thousands of Victorians. Below is a sample of this feedback:

- ‘A group of us are using the info from the map to lobby for a hot water pool in Emerald.’
- ‘Practical and informative’
- ‘The map is world-class and gives people information about facilities and resources in their local areas.’
- ‘Brilliant. I will personally inform our state members of parliament and my GP clinic.’
- ‘My experience is that people living in an area for 20+ years may not be aware of facilities demonstrated in the map. E.g. WAVES classes in their own local neighbourhood!’

The Arthritis Map aims to be the ‘go-to’ online source for service information related to musculoskeletal conditions in Victoria.

The future of the Arthritis Map

Ensuring data on the Arthritis Map remains relevant and up-to-date is paramount to the map’s ongoing success and AV staff update the map data each month. Ongoing funding of the project is currently being sought to continue these updates and to continuously improve the Arthritis Map. A number of other peak health bodies have shown interest in the maps capabilities and the potential of a chronic disease map is being explored at present.

Although a number of other ‘health maps’ have been launched in recent years, the geospatial technology platform on which the Map is built is an Australian first in health. Arthritis Victoria is aware that the product we have is unique and, according to General Practice Victoria, The Department of Health and other sources, has capabilities in e-health beyond any other technology platform currently being used in Australia or Internationally.

Conclusion

The Arthritis Map is a useful tool for people living with musculoskeletal conditions, health professionals, researchers, service providers and policy makers. It presents data in an efficient and easy-to-use format to improve prevention, self-management and service navigation. By providing indicators for service delivery needs across Victoria, it will help to improve health planning efforts and health outcomes across the state.

The Arthritis Map of Victoria can be accessed by clicking on the link at [www.arthritisvic.org.au](http://www.arthritisvic.org.au)
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