

# The Arthritis Action Plan: Shaping the Future

By Trish Barbato, President and CEO, Arthritis Society Canada



Rheumatologists know better than anyone: It's not "just arthritis"—it's a devastating reality that silently destroys lives. Every day, millions of Canadians struggle with tasks most take for granted: holding a coffee cup, climbing stairs, or even hugging their children. This invisible disease costs our economy \$33 billion annually yet remains critically underfunded and overlooked.

That's about to change with the Arthritis Action Plan.

The Arthritis Action Plan is an unprecedented collaboration of 20+ leading organizations uniting to transform arthritis care in Canada. Our mission? To revolutionize outcomes for the 6 million Canadians battling this debilitating condition.

Our strategy rests on three powerful pillars:

1. Awareness and Advocacy: Breaking the silence around arthritis and demanding the attention it deserves.
2. Access to Care: Eliminating barriers that prevent Canadians from receiving vital treatment, regardless of location or background.
3. Research and Innovation: Prioritizing research to accelerate breakthrough discoveries and paths to cures.

The momentum is building, and arthritis clinicians, specialists, researchers and patients have been part of the journey at every step. For example, the Canadian Rheumatology Association, under Dr. Ahmad Zbib's leadership, is spearheading efforts to articulate the key imperatives under the "Access to Care" pillar of the plan. Chairing a working group of experts, Dr. Zbib will support the creation of recommendations to redefine equitable, patient-centered care. In addition, our "Research and Innovation" pillar leaders, including Dr. Diane Lacaille and Dr. Hani El-Gabalawy, have already engaged 400-plus researchers and patients and, collaboratively with arthritis researchers from centres across the country, will prioritize research initiatives that will position Canada at the forefront of arthritis innovation.

We're also focused on addressing disparities in care. Dr. David Robinson is part of the Equity Advisory Group, tasked to ensure our approach serves everyone—from young adults to seniors across all socioeconomic backgrounds. Dr. Cheryl Barnabe brings an Indigenous lens to our Research and Innovation work and is supporting our effort to reflect on and respond to the Truth and Reconciliation recommendations for health.

The Arthritis Action Plan will launch in April 2026, and your expertise and insights are crucial in this transformative journey. Together, we can build a future where arthritis is understood, treated effectively, and eventually cured.

Join us in this historic initiative. Visit [arthritis.ca/AAP](https://arthritis.ca/AAP) to learn more about how you can shape the future of arthritis care.