

Failure to prevent fractures costing SA more than \$255 million each year: Osteoporosis Australia report

Launch of national SOS Fracture Alliance to 'make the first break the last'

The brittle bones of South Australians aged 50 plus are expected to cost \$255 million in 2017,¹ while the total cost over 10 years will climb to \$1.8 billion by 2022.¹

This is according to the first State report analysing the costs and burden of poor bone health for South Australia, set for release by Osteoporosis Australia today (June 27, 2017).

Release of the *Osteoporosis costing South Australia: A burden of disease analysis* report, will coincide with the launch of the independent SOS Fracture Alliance – Australia's only national alliance of 30 medical, allied health, patient and consumer organisations focusing on the prevention of osteoporotic fractures.

According to Orthopaedic Trauma surgeon and immediate past President, Australasian Orthopaedics Trauma Society, Professor Mellick Chehade, Adelaide, 433,000 South Australians aged 50 and above are currently living with brittle bones.¹ This figure is expected to increase by more than 10 per cent to over 480,000 within the next five years,¹ leading to a cascade of fractures. With appropriate treatment the majority of these fractures may be preventable, reducing suffering, improving the lives of the patients and their carers and also saving millions of dollars. The report estimates by 2022, there will be 15,300 fractures in South Australia each year."¹

"A broken bone in this age group is usually a trigger sign that we need to take action to prevent more bone loss, as each fracture significantly raises the risk of a further fracture."¹

"What is extremely worrying is that four-out-of-five Australians treated for an osteoporotic fracture are not tested for osteoporosis, and therefore, are not offered treatment for osteoporosis,"² said Prof Chehade.

"There is a significant gap in osteoporosis care, and our hospitals are becoming revolving doors for fracture patients being sent home, and returning with new fractures, rather than being properly assessed and treated for osteoporosis."

Founder and Chair of the SOS Fracture Alliance, Professor Markus Seibel, Sydney said Australians are being unnecessarily left to endure the pain of repeated fractures, and should regard the new figures as a serious public health warning.

"Two thirds of South Australians aged 50 and above have poor bone health or osteoporosis, and many don't know it, even when they have obvious risk factors, or already have sustained a fracture,"¹ Prof Seibel said.

"More often than not, people are sent home, after their fracture has been 'fixed', and miss out on essential investigation and care which in many cases would prevent further fractures.

"The SOS Fracture Alliance is seeking to increase recognition nation-wide of first fractures in people with undiagnosed osteoporosis, to make their first break the last," said Prof Seibel.

"This is why the SOS Fracture Alliance strongly advocates the implementation, across the nation, of routine services that identify, investigate and treat patients with osteoporotic fractures. These secondary fracture prevention services will integrate all sectors of the health system, in particular, primary care and hospital-based services."

Mother to five boys, Fiona, 37, Adelaide fractured four vertebrae from a fall while hiking in New Zealand on February 1, 2016 – a day after her wedding. Due to her severe spinal injury, doctors arranged for Fiona to undergo a bone mineral density (BMD) test, which led to a subsequent diagnosis of osteoporosis.

"Judging by my pain, and the fact that I couldn't move, the doctors were fairly certain I had fractured my back. So they sent me for an X-ray to confirm their suspicions. When they told me I had fractured four vertebrae, I was in shock," explained Fiona, who had long suspected she was at risk of osteoporosis, given her strong family history of the disease.

"My father, both of his siblings, and his mother were all diagnosed with osteoporosis, and several of my cousins on my dad's side are also living with the disease. My mother and grandmother, both of whom have passed away, each developed a dowager's hump, and often battled back pain.

"I'm not certain whether they were diagnosed with osteoporosis, but I definitely suspect they were living with the disease," Fiona said.

Fiona's osteoporosis has since significantly restricted her daily activities. She had to stop breast feeding her baby, and couldn't even carry him.

Fiona is therefore supportive of the new SOS Fracture Alliance, citing "osteoporosis is not just an older person's disease – it can affect people of all ages. So it's really important for all adults to be aware of osteoporosis and their risk of sustaining a fracture.

"The SOS Fracture Alliance should help to heighten public awareness and understanding among people of all ages, about the importance of being proactive with regard to bone health, to help minimise the risk of fracture, and further fracture," said Fiona.

According to CEO of Osteoporosis Australia, Greg Lyubomirsky, Sydney, urgent action is needed to improve health outcomes for patients and their families.

"Breaking a bone is an immediate and ongoing medical emergency. It involves time in hospital, surgery, rehabilitation and often home care.

"Fractures adversely impact patients and their families. Fractures disrupt daily activities, are painful, and take a long time to recover from," Mr Lyubomirsky said.

"It is our collective responsibility to stop osteoporotic fractures from occurring.

"Fractures are an important cause of death in older people, and require the same focus and attention as heart attacks and stroke," said Mr Lyubomirsky.

"Yet, we know too many fracture patients are leaving hospital without appropriate investigation for osteoporosis.¹

"Our report released today clearly demonstrates the high cost to the healthcare system of the growing numbers of preventable fractures.¹ We must do better," Mr Lyubomirsky said.

Osteoporosis affects women and men, and occurs when bones lose their quality and strength, weakening the skeleton.³ Osteoporotic-fractures most often occur in the spine, hip, wrist, upper arm, ribs, and pelvis.³ Proper medical investigation and management can halve the risk of further fracture.³

Direct costs of managing fractures from osteoporosis include ambulance services, hospitalisations, emergency and outpatient departments, rehabilitation and community services.¹ These are preventable costs.

About the SA report

The ***Osteoporosis costing South Australia: A burden of disease analysis*** report forms part of a series of reports commissioned by Osteoporosis Australia, and co-authored by health economics experts from the Australian Catholic University and Deakin University. The report investigates the rising costs and burden of poor bone health and related fractures.¹

The report reveals 36 fractures occur each day among residents aged over 50 in South Australia.¹ The total costs of brittle bones in those aged 50 and above in South Australia is projected to reach \$255 million this year, \$176 million (69 per cent) of which will relate directly to fracture costs.¹ By 2022, it is estimated 15,300 fractures will occur each year (42 per day).¹

About the SOS Fracture Alliance

The Australian National SOS Fracture Alliance unites 30 medical, allied health, patient and consumer organisations under its umbrella. The more than 2.91 million individual members have one common goal – to 'make the first break the last' by improving nation-wide care for patients presenting with a minimal trauma fracture. The SOS Fracture Alliance is working to close this gap in osteoporosis care by addressing the fact that the overwhelming majority of patients who sustain an osteoporotic fracture receive no investigation, nor treatment to prevent further fractures. Comparatively, Australia has one of the world's poorest rates of identifying and managing osteoporotic fractures appropriately – some 70 to 80 per cent of women who have broken a bone and would therefore qualify for osteoporosis treatment, are not investigated or diagnosed, nor receive appropriate medical care.^{1,4} As a result, the numbers of preventable fractures impacting patients, their families and the healthcare system are steadily growing.

For more information about osteoporosis and the *Osteoporosis costing South Australia: A burden of disease analysis* report, visit www.osteoporosis.org.au/burdenofdisease. For more information about the SOS Fracture Alliance, visit www.SOSfracturealliance.org.au.

MEDIA CONTACTS: Kirsten Bruce, John Wanna from VIVA! Communications 0401 717 566 / 0430 302 822.

DIGITAL MEDIA KIT: Available for download TUES, JUNE 27, 2017 at www.fracturepreventionmediakit.org

To learn more, visit: osteoporosis.org.au/burdenofdisease & SOSfracturealliance.org.au

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References

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