



## Burden of chronic pain in NZ worse than diabetes and dementia, says new report

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Chronic pain costs New Zealand more than diabetes or dementia yet there is not a comprehensive plan to address it, according to new research commissioned by the Faculty of Pain Medicine of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists.

One in five New Zealand adults suffer from chronic pain – about 770,000 people – and this number is expected to rise to around 1.26 million people by 2048 as the population ages, pushing the cost up to more than \$24 billion, according to “The Problem of Chronic Pain and Scope for Improvements in Patient Outcomes”.

“Research also shows chronic pain is a driver of poverty affecting Māori, Pasifika and women disproportionately,” says spokesperson for FPM, Professor Ted Shipton, who is a specialist pain medicine physician.

There are just 11 full-time specialists in New Zealand. The internationally recommended number for our population is more than four times that number.

The faculty says there is growing interest from both politicians and policy makers in developing a National Pain Strategy.

“More hospital-based multi-disciplinary pain clinics around the country would stem the rising cost and impact of chronic pain on New Zealand,” says Professor Ted Shipton. Pain experts say chronic pain should be given priority and recognised as a disease in its own right.

“We’ve got the research that points to a model that works and a way to make that a reality throughout the country,” he says.

“Improving access to specialised chronic pain services benefits patients and their families and the surrounding communities by reducing demand on our health care resources. It also assists patients back to an active and productive life.”

“Chronic pain is complex and needs a complex response. That might mean assessment of pain conditions, prescribing medication, co-ordinating rehabilitation, performing medical procedures, counselling patients and families, leading a multidisciplinary team, co-operating with other healthcare professionals, and liaising with public and private agencies. We need more pain clinics attached to hospitals where physicians can work across these areas.”

In May, chronic pain will be included in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD 11) for the first time recognising that it affects 20% of people worldwide and is a major source of suffering and economic burden. It is hoped that the inclusion of the chronic pain conditions in what is called the ‘Bible’ of diseases, will contribute to improved access to adequate pain treatment for sufferers worldwide.