

Nation's staggering 173,000 broken bones prompts urgent call to prioritise bone health

Osteoporosis Australia rebrands as 'Healthy Bones Australia' & launches educational resource hub

Osteoporosis Australia announced its official rebrand as 'Healthy Bones Australia' today (Tuesday, February 9) to reinforce the importance of prevention, in response to the concerning 173,000 broken bones sustained by the Australian population last year.¹

The patient organisation also called for Australians to "prioritise their bone health", by learning the risk factors for, and how to best prevent, brittle bones and osteoporosis.

This announcement today coincides with the publication of an article by Healthy Bones Australia experts in [MJA Insight](#), presenting preliminary findings and recommendations from their recent Inaugural National Consumer and Community Forum. The Forum was convened to hear directly from people of different ages living with osteoporosis, and to address health system barriers to improving Australian's bone health.

According to *MJA Insight* article co-author and Medical Director, Healthy Bones Australia, Professor Peter Ebeling AO, Melbourne, given the growing prevalence of osteoporosis and the increasing number of associated fractures, much more must be done to improve public awareness of the importance of maintaining healthy bones, and the diagnosis, and treatment for those "at risk", and living with the disease.

"Concerningly, the prevalence of osteoporosis in Australia is on the rise, with more than 4.74 million Australians over 50 years of age (approximately two-thirds of those aged 50+) living with poor bone health.¹

"Early diagnosis of osteoporosis is vital to reducing fracture rates, and their subsequent impacts and costs. These osteoporotic fractures cost the Australian healthcare system more than \$3 billion each year,"² said Prof Ebeling.

The Forum called for heightened community awareness, education, improved diagnosis and management of osteoporosis. Recommendations included:

- **The critical need for readily accessible osteoporosis treatments;**
- **Improved capture of patients post-fracture through the hospital system, to both diagnose osteoporosis and commence treatment (via more Fracture Prevention Clinics);**
- **A substantial increase in Australian's awareness of risk factors for poor bone health and osteoporosis; and**
- **General Practitioners (GPs) to focus more on bone health to prevent osteoporosis and fractures.**

"The renaming of our consumer organisation to 'Healthy Bones Australia' reflects our aim – to protect, build and support better bone health for all Australians," Prof Ebeling said.

The forum was convened as part of the [National Strategic Action Plan for Osteoporosis](#) (released by the Federal Government in 2019). Forum participants, including GPs, specialist groups, policy makers, professional associations, national health organisations, people living with osteoporosis, community groups and other bone health-related organisations, examined current challenges and issues facing the health system, and concurred that in Australia, community understanding of the importance of bone health is limited, and should therefore become a much higher national health priority.

According to *MJA Insight* article co-author and Deputy Chair of the Medical and Scientific Advisory Committee, Healthy Bones Australia, Dr Weiwen Chen, Sydney, educating target populations about the risk factors for osteoporosis is critical to ensuring earlier diagnosis of the disease, reducing fracture rates, and curbing their impact and cost.

"Public health messaging about the importance of prioritising and maintaining healthy bones tailored to those aged 50 and over with risk factors, younger adults with specific risk factors, and those who have sustained a fracture, is very important.

"Evidenced-based, consumer resources are vital, alongside core services, such as a national website, a toll-free helpline, risk factor fact sheets and online self-assessment tools, all of which are available free of charge from Healthy Bones Australia," Dr Chen said.

“These resources remain critical, together with targeted awareness campaigns, particularly given COVID-19 restrictions have shown online access to credible health information is highly valued.”

By 2022, around 6.2 million Australians over 50 years of age will be living with poor bone health (either osteoporosis or osteopenia),¹ equating to 183,105 fractures each year. By 2022, a fracture will occur every 2.9 minutes,¹ resulting in 501 fractures per day, 3,521 fractures per week, and 183,105 fractures per year.¹ By 2022, the projected total cost of poor bone health among Australians aged over 50 years will be \$3.84 billion, comprising ambulance services, hospitalisations, emergency department and outpatient services, rehabilitation, aged care and community services.¹ The total direct and indirect cost of poor bone health and its associated fractures over 10 years (2012-2022) is \$33.6 billion.¹

“Ignoring bone health has severe consequences, including broken bones. This should be avoided by focusing on prevention, which means understanding risk factors for poor bone health, early diagnosis and appropriate treatment,” said CEO of Healthy Bones Australia, Greg Lyubomirsky, Sydney.

“Our new name, ‘Healthy Bones Australia’, reflects this goal, while our new resource hub – healthybonesaustralia.org.au – offers the community valuable educational tools. Poor bone health is a public health issue – 173,000 broken bones each year is unacceptable.”

One of Australasia's most successful sixties female pop stars, Dinah Lee, 77, Sydney is preparing to embark on an Australian music tour. Had the tour been scheduled four years ago however, Dinah would have been unable to participate. Then plagued by persistent lower back pain, which compromised her ability to walk, Dinah visited her GP, who confirmed she had sustained several spinal fractures, and was living with osteoporosis – a disease that also afflicted her mum.

“I'd sustained so much bone loss by the time I saw my doctor, that he said I should have visited him 20 years earlier.”

Today, Dinah encourages all Australians, no matter what their age, to care for their bones, by learning how to best prevent osteoporosis, citing “It's important that everyone, from the young, to the old, focuses on building, and maintaining healthy bones.”

About osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a disease that leads to reduced bone strength and increased risk of fracture.^{1,3,4} Osteoporosis occurs when bones lose density and quality, leading to weakness of the skeleton.⁵ Once a fracture occurs, action must be taken to protect bone health, and the level of bone density is monitored to gauge improvement.^{5,6} Importantly, osteoporosis and osteopenia are not just seen in women only.⁷ Men account for up to 30 per cent of all fractures related to osteoporosis and osteopenia, and their associated costs.⁷

Fractures are expensive to treat and disruptive to the lives of patients and their families.¹ Data shows 22 per cent of people over 50 with poor bone health have osteoporosis.¹ The effects on quality of life include loss of independence, chronic pain, disability, emotional distress, lost productivity, and self-limitation caused by a fear of fractures.² Key risk factors include a prior fracture, family history, certain medical conditions or medications, early menopause/low testosterone, smoking and high alcohol intake.^{2,8,9}

About Healthy Bones Australia

Healthy Bones Australia, formerly Osteoporosis Australia, is a national not-for-profit organisation, and the leading consumer body charged with reducing broken bones and improving bone health across Australia. Healthy Bones Australia was established in 2001 in response to the growing number of Australians with poor bone health, and the lack of health focus on preventing osteoporosis. Healthy Bones Australia focuses on increasing community and health professional awareness, and advocating to government to reduce the impact of the osteoporosis nation-wide.

To learn more about Healthy Bones Australia, head to www.healthybonesaustralia.org.au.

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