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CONSUMER MEDIA RELEASE

Australian research reveals why months matter for children and young people with juvenile arthritis

Peer-reviewed Australian studies quantify the health, economic and everyday impact of juvenile arthritis[1,2]

- *Diagnosis within six months linked to less pain, better quality of life and $10,700 lower annual healthcare costs.[1]*
- *Children with juvenile arthritis average 25 health professional visits a year; half experience moderate-to-severe pain and miss around a month of school.[2]*
- *JAFA 'Kids Can't Wait' campaign expands to help families recognise the signs of juvenile arthritis earlier.*

Parliament House, Canberra, 12 October 2026: Two peer-reviewed Australian studies have now quantified the significant burden of juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA) on children and families – highlighting the crucial difference that months can make when it comes to diagnosis.[1,2]

Australian children with juvenile arthritis still wait an average of around 10 months for a diagnosis – similar to 25 years ago[2-4] – despite the incurable autoimmune disease being capable of causing irreversible damage and disability.[5]

In a study published in *Pediatric Rheumatology*, children diagnosed within six months of actively seeking treatment reported less pain and better quality of life. Annual healthcare costs were also $10,729 lower per child compared to those diagnosed at six months or later.[1]

The broader IMPACT Study found children and young people with juvenile arthritis average 25 health professional visits a year, with half experiencing moderate-to-severe pain and around one month of school missed each year. The total annual cost of JIA was $28,688 per child or young person, including $4,292 in out-of-pocket costs for families.[2]

Associate Professor Ruth Colagiuri AM, founder of the Juvenile Arthritis Foundation Australia (JAFA), said: "The Australian research gives us the clearest picture yet of the far-reaching impact juvenile arthritis can have on every part of a child's life – and why every month matters when it comes to getting children diagnosed and onto the treatment they need."

With earlier recognition and diagnosis critical to reducing the risk of long-term complications,[5] JAFA is expanding its national 'Kids Can't Wait' campaign into the community, helping parents and carers recognise the signs of juvenile arthritis and know when to seek advice.

Marking World Arthritis Day today, a National Stakeholder Forum at Parliament House will bring together children and families, health professionals, researchers and national leaders to accelerate earlier diagnosis and identify priorities for improving care and outcomes.

JAFA is also strengthening support for families already living with juvenile arthritis through a new Consumer Hub, to be officially launched at Parliament House by JAFA Patron, Her Excellency the

Honourable Sam Mostyn AC, Governor-General of Australia.

“For the past two and a half years our Early Diagnosis Program has been supporting healthcare professionals. It’s now time to take that work into the Australian community.

“The early signs of juvenile arthritis can be difficult for parents to recognise and easily mistaken for common childhood complaints, so helping families spot when something isn’t right is crucial. We want to make it easier for them to recognise the signs and set kids on the right path,” Associate Professor Colagiuri added.

Australian parents have never had more health information at their fingertips, but more information does not always mean clearer answers. Research shows 82% of parents of young children use social media to seek information about their child’s health,[6] while a national survey found 91% don’t fully understand the health information they find online.[7] More recently, Australian research found 55% of adults had used ChatGPT to check symptoms before seeing a doctor.[8]

“Families don’t necessarily need more information – they need clear, credible and practical information that helps them recognise when something isn’t right and know where to turn,” Associate Professor Colagiuri said.

The expansion of ‘Kids Can’t Wait’ marks the next phase of JAFA’s national Early Diagnosis Program and its work towards reducing average diagnosis time from around 10 months to 10 weeks by 2030 – a national goal backed by a Consensus Statement developed with the Australian Paediatric Rheumatology Group and supported by health and peak bodies across Australia.[9]

Professor Peter McCluskey AO, President of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO), a member of JAFA’s Early Diagnosis Program advisory group, said earlier recognition was critical to reducing the risk of serious complications.

“Juvenile arthritis is not only a disease of the joints. In some children it can cause inflammation of the eye, or uveitis, which may initially have few or no obvious symptoms but can threaten a child’s vision.

“Earlier recognition and referral give children the best opportunity to access the specialist care and treatment they need. Achieving earlier diagnosis will require continued awareness and collaboration across the health system and community,” Prof McCluskey added.

Andrew Harrison, Chair of JAFA, said: “Building on years of collaboration, the forum will put children’s and families’ voices at its centre through JAFA’s Tree of Truth, capturing their experiences and priorities for the future.

“Bringing together expertise and lived experience from across the health sector and broader community is central to the work we do at JAFA and to making progress towards earlier diagnosis and better outcomes for children and young people with juvenile arthritis,” Mr Harrison said.

To learn more visit www.jafa.org.au or https://jafa.org.au/hcphub/.
To hear from children living with juvenile arthritis, visit:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5X7xbnAM5f4

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About JAFA

The Juvenile Arthritis Foundation Australia (JAFA) is an award-winning registered charity and the national organisation dedicated exclusively to improving the lives of children and young people with juvenile arthritis and childhood rheumatic diseases, and their families. Founded in 2019, JAFA connects, supports and informs families, raises political, health professional and community awareness, works to improve earlier diagnosis and access to care, and fosters research towards better treatments, prevention and a cure.

About Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis (JIA) and Childhood Rheumatic Diseases (CRDs)

JIA and CRDs are painful, incurable, inflammatory, autoimmune conditions affecting the joints, eyes and, in some cases, the skin, muscles and internal organs. In Australia, there are approximately 6,000 to 10,000 children aged 0-16 years and up to 30,000 children and young people aged 0-24 years diagnosed with JA. Further still, many more children remain undiagnosed and live in avoidable pain. If not diagnosed early and treated effectively, JA can cause permanent disability in the form of joint deformity and loss of vision. Other CRDs are less common but equally serious.

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