

Number of Americans with disability growing; arthritis cited as most common cause

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Nearly 48 million Americans have a disability, an increase of three million from 1999, and arthritis tops the list of most common causes of disability, according to an article published today in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (MMWR). In addition, the number of people who report arthritis as the primary cause of disability has increased by one million. The Arthritis Foundation believes that findings from this study must be taken into consideration as a part of health care reform in this country and arthritis research and prevention efforts strengthened to reduce and minimize the burden of arthritis.

"[Arthritis](#) is a debilitating disease that profoundly impacts the lives of millions of Americans on a daily basis," said John H. Klippel, M.D., president and CEO, Arthritis Foundation. "The effects of the 46 million Americans with arthritis on the economy are enormous; the direct and indirect medical costs of this disease are estimated to be \$128 billion each year." Klippel adds that this figure stems from the fact that annually, arthritis accounts for 44 million outpatient visits, 992,100 hospitalizations and 9,367 deaths.

The numbers of individuals with arthritis who have a disability and are prevented from living their lives to the fullest are already staggering, and they are projected to worsen considerably. "With the aging of [baby boomers](#), the prevalence of arthritis is expected to rise by 40 percent -

that is up to 67 million people - by the year 2030," said Klippel. "These findings suggest a critical need to expand the reach of effective strategies aimed at disability prevention and management."

The disability caused by arthritis often robs people of the ability to live independently. People with arthritis commonly report needing help getting around inside their home, getting out of bed or a chair, bathing, dressing, eating and other important activities of daily living.

The new CDC report also found women are disproportionately affected by disability at all ages including the youngest age group (18-24 years of age). And, women are most likely to cite arthritis as the cause of their disability (6.4 million women vs. 2.2 million men).

"Today, more women are not only being diagnosed with arthritis, but now we learn they are more likely to be disabled by arthritis. Unless we focus more attention on arthritis prevention efforts, more women will live longer with the pain and disability of arthritis," said Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn).

The Arthritis Foundation has recommended to Congress that the CDC Arthritis Program be increased by \$10 million for a total appropriation of \$23 million, which amounts to just 50 cents per American with arthritis. The CDC Arthritis Program works with state health departments to increase the availability of evidence based programs to prevent and manage arthritis. Currently, only 12 states receive adequate federal support for arthritis prevention efforts.

Additionally, the Arthritis Foundation is working to curb the impact of arthritis through the Arthritis Prevention, Control and Cure Act (H.R.1210), which proposes strengthening public health prevention initiatives to ensure early diagnosis and appropriate management to help prevent permanent disability.

Klippel urged legislators to make this modest investment now; the alternative is to pay more for the burden of arthritis in escalating [health care](#) and disability costs and the impact on the American workforce. "We know that workers diagnosed with arthritis leave their jobs earlier than those without arthritis," he said. "Given the recession, any viable health care reform platform must ensure that our valuable workers stay healthy and stay on the job."

Source: Arthritis Foundation ([news](#) : [web](#))

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