



## **Muscle and joint pain costs European economies up to €240 billion a year**

*New study reveals musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) responsible for more sick days than any other health condition*

Brussels, 30 September 2009 – A new study today finds that musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) account for nearly half (49%) of all absences from work and 60% of permanent work incapacity in the European Union. These and other socio-economic consequences of suffering from poor health due to muscle and joint pain represent an estimated cost to society in Europe of up to €240 billion.<sup>1</sup>

The groundbreaking study, conducted across 25 European countries in Europe and beyond by UK-based research organisation The Work Foundation, finds 100 million Europeans suffer from chronic musculoskeletal pain – over 40 million of whom are workers – with up to 40% having to give up work due to their condition.

“MSDs clearly have a serious, negative impact on the EU workforce, as they were responsible for millions of lost working days – 9.5 million were lost in one year in the UK alone,” says Stephen Bevan, managing director of The Work Foundation. “As Europe now struggles to emerge from the global recession, one consideration policy-makers should address is how labour productivity in businesses is being undermined by these often very painful conditions.”

### **Early interventions make a difference**

This pan-European research suggests that early detection of, and intervention in, MSDs ultimately reduces the burden on governments’ health and disability budgets, and measurably improves the lives of European citizens – and employees’ performance. The Fit for Work report also recommends a new and more inclusive method to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of treating illness in general, and MSDs in particular: one that considers more than simply the up-front costs of medical expenditure and incorporates wider socio-economic considerations - such as work productivity - into the financial and medical evaluations for treating MSDs and other chronic conditions. Such an approach could provide a more holistic and perhaps more realistic assessment of the overall costs and benefits of diagnosis, prevention and treatment, the report argues.

Tatiana Quadrello, senior researcher at The Work Foundation, adds, “The *Fit for Work* study clearly suggests that early intervention is a key factor in allowing people with MSDs to remain in work. This has provided us with the beginnings of a potential calculation of an ‘early intervention premium’ which could encourage Governments and healthcare professionals to consider this when discussing intervention policies.”

The *Fit for Work* research has shown that people with musculoskeletal disorders who are able to work can experience health, social, psychological and economic benefits. According to Maarten de Wit, former Vice President of EULAR-PARE<sup>♦</sup>, “Workers with MSDs who are supported at work are more productive and represent a return on investment for businesses. In addition, working and homemaking increase people’s sense of worth, making them happier and more productive and engaged members of society.”

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<sup>1</sup> The Fit for Work research found that MSDs cost the EU from 0.5%-2% of GDP annually. EU27 GDP in 2007 was €12.3 trillion. A loss of 2 % is approximately €240bn. Figures calculated from *Europe in Figures – Eurostat yearbook 2009*, published 18 September 2009.

<sup>♦</sup> EULAR-PARE: the European League Against Rheumatism-People with Arthritis and Rheumatism in Europe

# Press release

**Embargoed until  
00:01 CEST, 30 September 2009**

## **A call for coordinated and focused action**

Based on this pan-European study, the Fit for Work campaign is being launched today at the European Parliament in Brussels by MEPs Edite Estrela (SD, Portugal) and Antonyia Parvanova (ALDE, Bulgaria), with a keynote address from Belgian Minister for Employment and Equal Opportunities, Joëlle Milquet, and Isabel de la Mata, Principal Adviser with special interest in Public Health at the European Commission Directorate General for Health and Consumers. Professor Paul Emery, serving president of the European League against Rheumatism (EULAR), will close the launch with a call for action from policymakers, healthcare professionals, patients and employers. The launch of the project in Brussels is in partnership with leading European research organisation RAND Europe, and has been endorsed by the Swedish Presidency of the European Union.

“Only coordinated action between governments, business, the healthcare professional community and patients will result in interventions that allow those living with MSDs to stay working, contribute to society and maintain quality of life,” says Edite Estrela MEP. The co-host of the launch event, Antonyia Parvanova MEP added, “Once governments have agreed that MSDs are a priority, they should set out national welfare and public health plans addressing these conditions, establishing frameworks for the delivery of care and services for people with MSDs.”

For more information, visit [www.fitforworkeurope.eu](http://www.fitforworkeurope.eu) or contact Jenny Taylor on +44 20 7976 3519 or [jtaylor@theworkfoundation.com](mailto:jtaylor@theworkfoundation.com).

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## **Notes to editors**

### About Musculoskeletal Disorders

Musculoskeletal disorders is an umbrella term covering over 200 conditions that affect the muscles, joints, tendons, ligaments, peripheral nerves and supporting blood vessels, causing pain and functional impairment to sufferers (Punnett et al, 2004).

### About The Work Foundation

The Work Foundation is the leading independent authority on work and its future. It aims to improve the quality of working life and the effectiveness of organisations by equipping leaders, policymakers and opinion-formers with evidence, advice, new thinking and networks. It also runs a major programme of research and consultancy around Health and Wellbeing issues.

### About RAND Europe's health research

RAND Europe is an independent, not-for-profit research institution with offices in Cambridge UK and Brussels. Its mission is to help improve policy and decision making through research and analysis. RAND Europe is part of the larger RAND Corporation, an independent, nonprofit institution that provides research and security, civil justice, the environment, and health and health care policy.



### About the Fit for Work project

The Work Foundation's Fit for Work project is supported by a research grant from Abbott, the global healthcare company, and logistical support from Weber Shandwick. Fit for Work reports are produced independently by The Work Foundation, with full editorial control resting with The Work Foundation alone. For further information please contact Amandine de Coster at Weber Shandwick: +32 2 894 9017 or [adecoster@webershandwick.com](mailto:adecoster@webershandwick.com) or Nasreen Memon at The Work Foundation on + 44 207 976 3507 or [nmemon@theworkfoundation.com](mailto:nmemon@theworkfoundation.com).

For information and the opportunity to comment on making Europe Fit for Work, go to [www.fitforworkeurope.eu](http://www.fitforworkeurope.eu).