

**Arthritis Australia 2024 National Research Program**

**Project Grant**

## **Final report**

# **Living clinical practice guidelines for management of shoulder pain in primary care: Priority questions**

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**Lay Summary:**

Many people experience shoulder pain, which can interfere with daily life, sleep, work and mental wellbeing. It is one of the most common musculoskeletal problems seen in primary care. Yet current clinical guidelines for managing shoulder pain are often outdated, low in quality, and developed without enough input from clinicians or people with lived experience.

This project was the first step in creating a high-quality, continuously updated (“living”) clinical guideline for people with shoulder pain in Australia. Living guidelines are regularly updated as new research emerges, ensuring that recommendations remain current, evidence-based, and relevant to clinicians and patients.

We used a structured two-phase Delphi survey to identify the most important clinical questions. Nearly 200 participants took part, including general practitioners, physiotherapists, rheumatologists, shoulder surgeons, researchers, and people living with shoulder pain. Together, they identified priority areas such as: how to distinguish between different shoulder conditions, which clinical tests are most useful, when imaging or specialist referral is needed, the role of medicines and steroid injections, benefits of exercise and other non-drug treatments, and what types of surgery are effective. People with shoulder pain also highlighted the importance of self-management, education, functional aids, and complementary therapies like acupuncture, cupping, and herbal medicine.

This project provides the foundation for national living guidelines on shoulder pain. These guidelines will focus on what matters most, helping people and their healthcare providers make better decisions. They will also ensure new evidence is used quickly, with the aim of improving quality of life and avoiding unnecessary healthcare costs.