Australian Commission on **Safety and Quality** in Health Care

November 2026

Knee osteoarthritis care in Australia

Osteoarthritis of the knee affects many people aged over 45 years and is a common cause of pain, joint stiffness and disability. The Atlas Focus Report: Osteoarthritis of the knee reveals the national rates of knee imaging, hospitalisations for knee arthroscopy and knee replacement surgery, highlighting potentially inappropriate care.

About Knee Osteoarthritis

Around

1.9 million

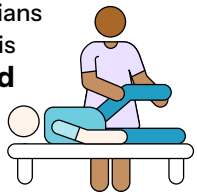


Australians have knee osteoarthritis

Source: Global Burden of Disease Study

From 1990 to 2019
the number of Australians with knee osteoarthritis **more than doubled**

↑126%

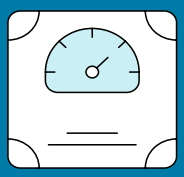


Source: Global Burden of Disease Study

Higher risk of knee osteoarthritis

2x if overweight

4x if living with obesity



Source: ACR Journals

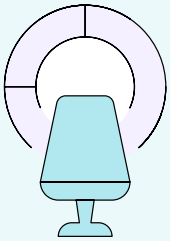
Imaging Rates

National rates, MBS-subsidised imaging, people aged 45+, between 2019–20 and 2023–24

Knee CTs

↑83%

over 5 years



Imaging for knee osteoarthritis may lead to unnecessary concern and **trigger inappropriate care** such as further tests, specialist referrals and **surgery**

Knee ultrasounds

↑26%

over 5 years



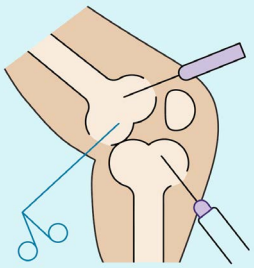
Surgical Interventions

National rates of hospitalisations, people aged 45+, between 2014–15 and 2023–24

Knee arthroscopy* rates

↓50%

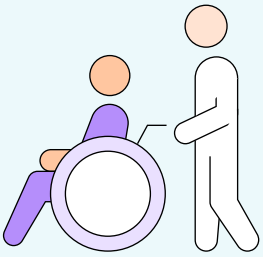
in line with guideline recommendations



Knee replacements

↑17%

and should be reserved for those with severe pain and disability



3 steps to improve care for knee osteoarthritis

1 Limit knee imaging

Diagnosis should be based on history and examination; knee imaging should not be used routinely. If imaging is warranted, X-ray is the first preference.

2 Proactive management

People can often reduce pain and improve mobility by focusing on non-surgical interventions, such as physical activity, exercise, weight management and pain relief.

3 Surgery is the last resort

Knee replacement surgery should be reserved for those with severe pain and/or functional impairment.

Knee arthroscopy* is not appropriate for managing uncomplicated osteoarthritis.

*Knee arthroscopy is keyhole surgery to examine the knee joint or remove damaged tissue.

Find out more at
safetyandquality.gov.au/Atlas-KneeOA

Scan for more information