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**

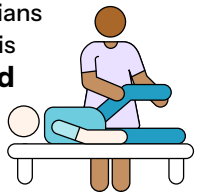


Australians have knee osteoarthritis

Source: Global Burden of Disease Study

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

**↑126%**

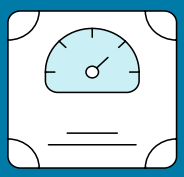


Source: Global Burden of Disease Study

Higher risk of knee osteoarthritis

**2x** if overweight

**4x** if living with obesity



Source: ACR Journals

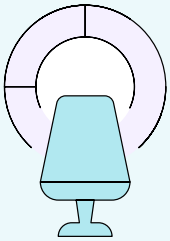
## Imaging Rates

**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



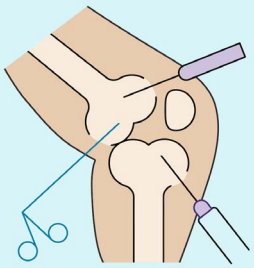
## Surgical Interventions

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

Knee arthroscopy* rates

**↓50%**

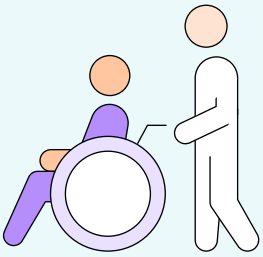
in line with guideline recommendations



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**