

# Implementation of a novel pathway of care for common musculoskeletal conditions in primary care

ACTRN12619000871145

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**Status** RECRUITING  
**Sponsor** University of Sydney  
**Enrollment** 716 participants

## Plain Language Summary

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Back pain, neck pain, and knee osteoarthritis are among the most common reasons people see their GP or physiotherapist. Unfortunately, care quality varies widely, and people often receive treatments that are not based on the best evidence. The PACE pathway is a structured clinical approach that first identifies whether a patient is at low, medium, or high risk of a poor outcome — then matches the level of care to that risk. Low-risk patients receive simple, evidence-based advice and a few sessions of guided exercise. Higher-risk patients are referred to a musculoskeletal specialist who works with the patient and their GP to personalise their care.

This implementation study will evaluate whether rolling out this pathway in primary care (general practice and physiotherapy) leads to better health outcomes and is more cost-effective than usual care. Patients with low back pain, neck pain or whiplash, or knee osteoarthritis who are seeking care within four weeks of symptom onset will be enrolled.

Participants must be proficient in English and meet specific clinical criteria for each condition. People with suspected serious spinal pathology (such as cancer in the spine), fractures, severe depression, or those scheduled for knee replacement are excluded. This research could fundamentally reshape how musculoskeletal conditions are managed in Australian primary care, ensuring people get the right level of support from the start.

## Key Eligibility Criteria

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### Exclusion (5)

- Known or suspected serious spinal pathology (e.g. metastatic disease of the spine)
- Confirmed fracture or dislocation at time of injury (WAD IV).
- Extreme depression defined as at risk of self-harm (answering yes to Item 9 of the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9)).
- Above average health according to the SF12 (>80/100 on the transformed score)
- Knee OA patients excluded if they have undergone or are scheduled for joint replacement surgery.

## Locations (6 total)

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Royal Prince Alfred Hospital - Camperdown, NSW,QLD,WA,VIC, Australia  
Royal North Shore Hospital - St Leonards, NSW,QLD,WA,VIC, Australia  
Princess Alexandra Hospital - Woolloongabba, NSW,QLD,WA,VIC, Australia  
... and 3 more locations

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<https://www.anzctr.org.au/Trial/Registration/TrialReview.aspx?ACTRN=ACTRN12619000871145>

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