

1-in-2 Women With Back Pain Report Mental Health Impacts As Cost Of Living Prevents Them Seeking Treatment

New Spinal Health Month data finds 86.7% of Aussie women had back pain in the past year, with 1 in 2 experiencing moderate-severe mental health impacts

SYDNEY, NSW, AUSTRALIA, June 15, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- TODAY, the Australian Chiropractors Association (ACA) released new national survey data revealing that 86.7% of Australian women suffered back pain in the past 12 months.

Of those women afflicted 77.3% experienced mental fatigue, 54.8% reported it added to their mental load, and 47.6% experienced a moderate-to-extreme mental health impact as a result of back pain.



Cost is keeping women with back pain from treatment. 49.7% say the cost of living has stopped them seeking treatment — and 53.7% have never had a formal diagnosis. Back pain isn't just physical; it's a mental health and affordability issue. This Spinal He

The survey also highlighted spinal health issues in the context of family households revealing that back pain extends well beyond individual sufferers affecting 9.7 million Australian households (89.7%) with respondents reporting that in 5.4% of households a child under 18 is also living with back pain.

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Back pain is not just a musculoskeletal problem; it incorporates mental health, equity and quality-of-life issues that deserve far greater attention. The survey data is unambiguous.”

Dr Ali Young

The new data obtained from the 2026 Spinal Health Survey, an independent national survey by Pureprofile (May-2026) of 1,040 Australian adults (528 Women and 512 Males), revealed that although the prevalence is slightly lower than men (87.5%), women experience significantly higher psychological consequences due to back pain with 47.6% of women with back pain in the last year reporting

moderate-to-extreme mental health impact, compared to 44.2% of men.

ACA Women In Chiropractic Chair Dr Ali Young said, “Although it’s well documented that back pain and mental health conditions are linked and can cause an impaired quality of life, the survey data is unambiguous with women suffering from back pain reporting higher rates of mental exhaustion, sleep disruption, depression and mental load compared to men; and were less likely to have sought diagnosis or professional treatment.

“With 53.7% of women suffering back pain reporting they’ve never sought a formal medical diagnosis, saying the barriers partly financial; 49.7% of women said the cost of living has prevented them from seeking treatment which was 10.9 percentage points (a relative increase of 28.1%) higher than men (38.8%).

“The survey results should prompt a serious national conversation about how women can improve their spinal health because back pain is not just a musculoskeletal problem; it incorporates mental health, equity and quality-of-life issues that deserve far greater attention," she said.

The mental health burden of back pain in Australia shows the gender gap in mental health impact to be widest in the 25–30 age group, with 63.5% of women aged 25–30 having back pain reporting moderate-to-extreme mental health impact compared to 44.7% of men in the same bracket - an 18.8 percentage point difference and the largest gender gap of any age group in the survey.

The survey also revealed that women are significantly more likely to suffer chronic pain than



The negative mental health impacts from back pain hits young women hardest. 63.5% of women aged 25–30 with back pain report a moderate-to-extreme mental health impact — compared to just 44.7% of men the same age. A healthy spine supports a healthy mind. #

Table B - Back Pain Sufferers: Last 12 Months (Low, Mid, Upper, Non Specific)

Metric	ALL BP (n=906)			WOMEN (n=458)			MEN (n=448)			SENIORS (n=249)		
	n	%BP	%All	n	%BP	%All	n	%BP	%All	n	%BP	%All
% of all respondents	906		87.1%	458		86.7%	448		87.5%			
MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT												
Moderate to Extreme impact	416	45.9%	40%	218	47.6%	41.3%	198	44.2%	38.7%	79	31.7%	26.4%
Any level of impact (incl. slight)	629	69.4%	60.5%	319	69.7%	60.4%	310	69.2%	60.5%	139	55.8%	46.5%
CHRONIC PAIN												
Chronic pain (3+ months)	418	46.1%	40.2%	221	48.3%	41.9%	197	44%	38.5%	126	50.6%	42.1%
QUALITY OF LIFE												
Often / Always impacted	276	30.5%	26.5%	138	30.1%	26.1%	138	30.8%	27%	75	30.1%	25.1%
Any level of impact	767	84.7%	73.8%	382	83.4%	72.3%	385	85.9%	75.2%	217	87.1%	72.6%
MENTAL FATIGUE												
Often / Always	247	27.3%	23.8%	131	28.6%	24.8%	116	25.9%	22.7%	49	19.7%	16.4%
Any level (incl. rarely / sometimes)	686	75.7%	66%	354	77.3%	67%	332	74.1%	64.8%	169	67.9%	56.5%
MENTAL LOAD												
Adds to mental load	471	52%	45.3%	251	54.8%	47.5%	220	49.1%	43%	100	40.2%	33.4%
LIFE IMPACTS												
Struggled with depression / anxiety	97	10.7%	9.3%	53	11.6%	10%	44	9.8%	8.6%	32	12.9%	10.7%
Less physically mobile	240	26.5%	23.1%	118	25.8%	22.3%	122	27.2%	23.8%	111	44.6%	37.1%
Difficulty concentrating	215	23.7%	20.7%	100	21.8%	18.9%	115	25.7%	22.5%	39	15.7%	13%
Mental exhaustion	145	16%	13.9%	91	19.9%	17.2%	54	12.1%	10.5%	30	12%	10%

Table of mental health and back pain experienced in past 12 months.

men with 46.5% of women with back pain reporting having chronic pain compared with 41.6% of men, while among women aged 41–50, the chronic pain rate reaches 46.8% - 13.1 percentage points above men in the same bracket.

“With numerous studies finding people living with chronic back pain are at heightened risk of experiencing mental health problems including a study by the International Association for the Study of Pain (2021), the significantly high number of women reporting chronic back pain is concerning,” said Dr Young.

“Women are managing back pain alongside the mental, physical and financial demands of family life with the data showing the combined load is substantial,” said Dr Young.

Women reported that they were more likely than men to cite caregiving and household responsibilities as contributing to their back pain with 16.4% of women nominating housework as a trigger (vs 9.5% of men), and 7.6% cited caring for a child, elderly person or person with disability.

Pregnancy is also reported as a contributing factor by 6.9% of women with back pain, with the physical demands of pregnancy followed by the sustained physical demands of early parenthood that represents a significant risk window for the development or worsening of spinal conditions.

In women, depression or anxiety from back pain peaked in the 51–60 age group at 17.1% - a critical age that coincides with peak income-earning, caring responsibilities and hormonal changes.

“It’s recognised by healthcare professionals that chronic back pain can lead to psychological and social problems when depressive symptoms worsen back pain and increase the disability associated with it, which in turn can exacerbate back pain’s negative impact on the mental health of sufferers,” she said.

“The vicious cycle of back pain triggering a mental health problem can lead to the original back pain problem worsening and continue to accelerate unabated in the absence of interventions to break the pain cycle, while the costs of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), including back pain, to the Australian economy continue to rise substantially,” Dr Young said.

PainAustralia reports the annual cost to the Australian economy for chronic pain is \$73.2 billion, and Musculoskeletal Australia reporting MSDs costing \$55.1 billion, including direct health costs, lost productivity and reduced quality of life.

With 6.1 million Australians already affected by MSDs, according to a Deloitte Access Economics (2019) report the rising cost of MSDs in Australia presents a strong case for a proactive, strategic response to MSD management (including back pain).

[Research by Monash University's School of Public Health](#) and Preventive Medicine (August 2025) has projected chronic back pain will cost the Australian economy \$638 billion in lost productivity over the next decade, and that if we fail to tackle common back pain through promoting advice to stay active and receive appropriate care, by 2033, 3.2 million working-age Australians will be living with chronic back pain, leading to a loss of approximately 4.6 per cent to Australia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over a 10-year period.

"With back pain posing a major public health burden impacting millions of women across Australia and long-term chronic back disorders projected to cost the Australian economy an estimated \$638 billion in lost productivity over the next decade; greater awareness of the back pain burden women carry, early intervention and improved affordability would make a meaningful difference to the health and wellbeing of Australian women and their families," Dr Young said.

This Spinal Health Month the ACA is encouraging women to access free spinal health resources, practical guides and information at www.spinalhealth.org.au to improve their spinal health and overall wellbeing.

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