



DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Annual Report 2023/24

**VERSUS
ARTHRITIS**

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1

Foreword

I am pleased to share Versus Arthritis' Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report for 2023/24 and share the progress we have made in progressing diversity and inclusion across Versus Arthritis. This is our third diversity and inclusion annual report and we are very much in a more positive place than when we first started to focus on putting diversity and inclusion at the heart of everything we do for people with arthritis. It is also the third year in a row for large improvements in our diversity and inclusion people survey questions, with more colleagues now agreeing that people at Versus Arthritis are treated equally (+23 percentage points vs. 2021).

We have been working hard to embed diversity and inclusion in our policies, processes and importantly in our behaviours and we have delivered an excellent calendar of events and learning

and development opportunities throughout the year. We now have the foundations in place for progressing diversity and inclusion at Versus Arthritis and our diversity and inclusion strategy 2021/24 has served us well and provided a focus for our work. We now need to align our diversity and inclusion work with our organisational strategy, which will support us to better connect with our underserved communities and better understand and address arthritis related health inequalities.

Thank you to everyone at Versus Arthritis who has been working hard to ensure that we are a values based, mission focused charity with a positive inclusive culture. We will continue to build our understanding and awareness of diversity, inclusion, ensuring it is at the heart of everything we do at Versus Arthritis.

Deborah Alsina MBE, CEO

“This is our third diversity and inclusion annual report and we are very much in a more positive place than when we first started to focus on putting diversity and inclusion at the heart of everything we do for people with arthritis.”



2

Highlights

We have been busy continuously refining our approach to diversity and inclusion, learning what works and what needs more development through engagement with our people and diversity and inclusion best practice and research.

2

Continued to host the Diversity and Inclusion Practitioner's Network, demonstrating our commitment to working across the sector.

3

All staff attended Disability Awareness training with Diversity and Ability, an award-winning social enterprise led by and for disabled people.

4

Delivered a diversity and inclusion calendar of events with 80% of the organisation attending and excellent feedback.

1

We established a Welsh Language Group and Versus Arthritis' Welsh Language Development Plan, approved by Welsh Language Commissioner.

5

We delivered a diversity and inclusion glossary, shared and consulted on with our groups and networks across Versus Arthritis.

6

We continued our relationship with Business Disability Forum, accessing resources, toolkits and webinars for all our people.

10

Revised our anti racism statement and resources.



11

Managed a network of Inclusion and Wellbeing Champions to help us build diversity and inclusion capacity across the organisation.



9

Supported our Menopause Support Group, celebrated World Menopause Day and developed and shared menopause resources.



8

Worked with our Race Equity Network, Disability Inclusion Network, LGBTQ+ Equality Network, Women's Network and Men's Network.



7

Established Community Involvement Network and payment for involved policy to increase our engagement with communities across the UK.



12

Worked with Diversify World to deliver workshops on cultural awareness and competency, allyships and microaggressions.

3

Education and Engagement

2023 saw us deliver an intersectional calendar of diversity and inclusion and build diversity and inclusion concepts and practices into staff training courses and workshops, to increase awareness of the need to handle different views, perceptions and ideas in positive ways. All new staff at versus Arthritis attend a mandatory Diversity and Inclusion workshop which explores the definitions of equality, equity, diversity and inclusion, the benefits of a diverse charity and an inclusive culture. The workshop also covers the challenges for progressing diversity and how we can be more aware of individual and systematic bias and blind spots that prevent the progression of diversity and inclusion at Versus Arthritis. This workshop has been delivered for 3 years and from January 2024, staff were invited to attend a refresher workshop that invites colleagues to reflect on how to progress diversity and inclusion in day to day work. The workshop supports colleagues to fully understand our organisational goals and objectives and our commitment to diversity and inclusion and to ensure a clear understanding of how to embed diversity and inclusion in our work. Colleagues are also encouraged to develop a plan for

measuring diversity and inclusion progress in their work. New starters are also required to complete anti-racism training and reflect on our commitment to anti-racism and access our updated resources. In January 2023, we introduced mandatory disability awareness training delivered by Diversity and Ability, an award-winning social enterprise led by and for disabled people. The workshop aims to improve knowledge and understanding of disabilities and the prevalence of both visible and invisible differences in the workplace. This training will highlight small changes that help to create an inclusive culture where everyone can thrive.

“It was really enlightening and useful to see the different perspectives about dyslexia ie education system, mother’s and young person living with dyslexia. Thank you for session.”

Our mandatory diversity and inclusion workshops are designed to ensure that all our people understand the importance of diversity inclusion, anti-racism and disability awareness in their work and how they can progress our commitments with tangible measurements. Our programme has been complimented by a range of intersectional workshops, often delivered in partnership with our staff networks. Topics include:

- Staff Networks Day 2023.
- Engaging communities delivered to colleagues in UK Delivery.
- Breast cancer awareness.
- Pride Month with a talk from founder of UK Black Pride, Lady Phyll.
- Switchboard LGBT,
- Mental health and wellbeing.
- Suicide prevention day
- A range of religious events.
- Bowel Cancer Awareness.
- National Inclusion Week 2023.
- Dyslexia Awareness Month.
- Black History Month 2024 – educating Future Black Researchers.
- International Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women.
- Race Equality Week 2024.
- Cultural awareness and competency.
- Microaggressions.
- International Women’s Day – Diversification of Research.

For 2024/25, we have worked with colleagues in internal communications and engagement, Learning and Development, Volunteering and Involvement and Safeguarding and Wellbeing to plan an intersectional calendar of events that accelerates understanding and implementation of Diversity, Inclusion and antiracism and supports us to become a great place to work and volunteer that meets our strategic objectives.

“A very good topic and very relevant to the work of VA and within teams. Three things that I took away as a side bonus of this event were, 1. Consultation with the community is key. 2. Don’t be afraid to try things out. 3. Don’t wait for the ‘perfect plan’ just do it.”

“Amazing event, great insight into LGBT+ Switchboard and the counselling model.”

4

People Survey 2023

We want to ensure that everyone working for Versus Arthritis can give their best to the organisation, feel engaged and supported in achieving more for and with people with arthritis. Versus Arthritis People Surveys are an opportunity for all our people to tell us what they think is good about working at Versus Arthritis and what we could do better. Having feedback that we can benchmark against year on year means that we can build a comprehensive picture of what our people like about Versus Arthritis and what we can be doing better so we can make informed improvements and changes where we need to. It is the also an opportunity to measure the progress of our diversity and inclusion activity. The most recent People Survey ran during September 2023, with 86% of staff sharing their views.

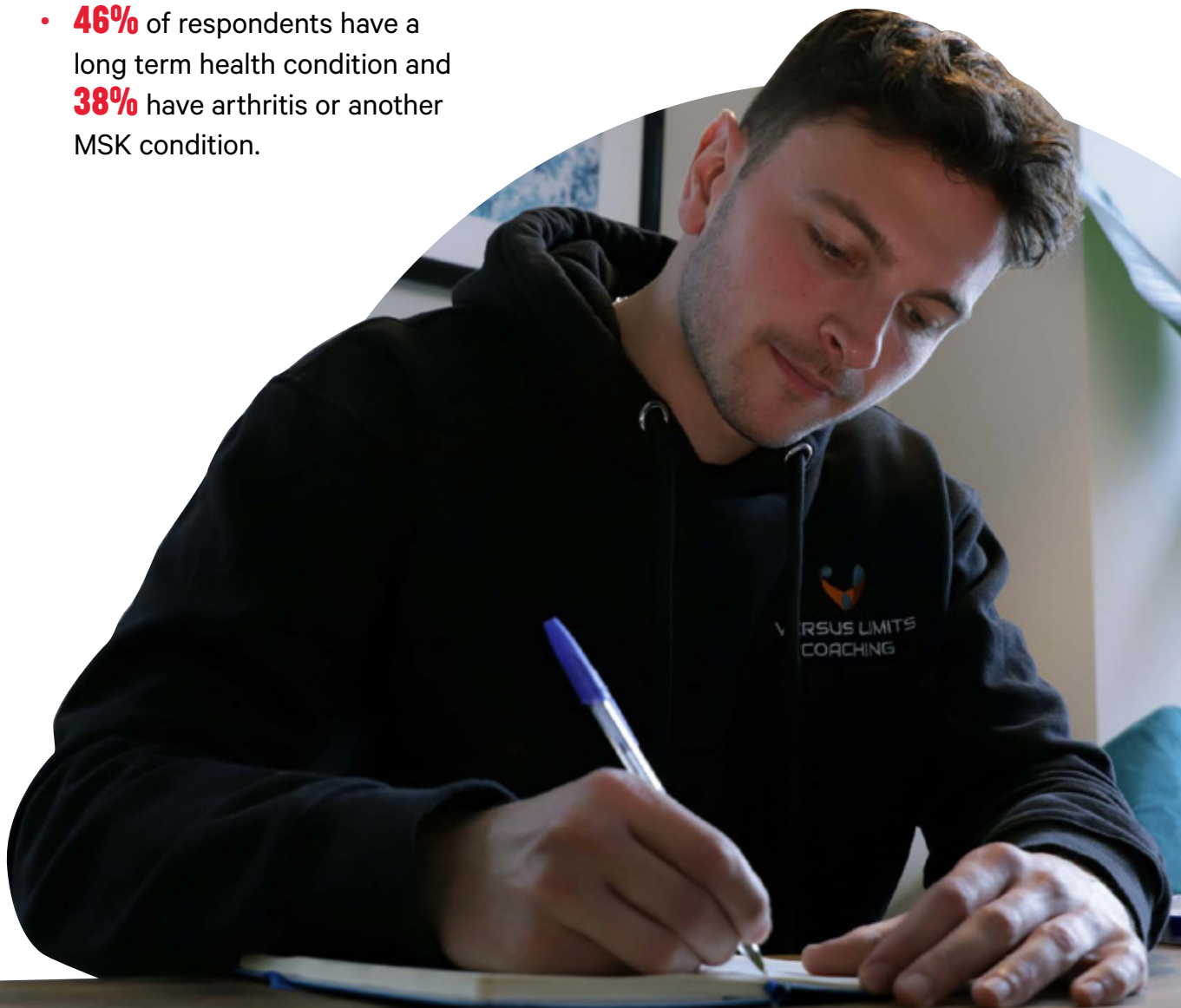
Encouragingly, amongst the top 5 largest improvements since 2021 are two statements relating to leadership, an area that had some of the lowest scores in the People Survey 2021 and positive progress has also been made in awareness of Versus Arthritis' organisational strategy and

understanding of its priorities (both improving by 26 percentage points compared to 2021), helping colleagues to make sense of their contribution and feel part of the organisation. Diversity and inclusion is the third area where large improvements have been made this year, with more colleagues now agreeing that people at Versus Arthritis are treated equally (+23 percentage points vs. 2021). In 2023, there are significantly more colleagues who feel supported by Versus Arthritis in relation to its current disability inclusion practice compared to the People Survey 2021 (+15 percentage points vs. 2021) and scores within 'Diversity and inclusion' are still strong and most, if not all, significantly improved compared to the results in the 2021 People Survey. Fewer colleagues at Versus Arthritis attended any of the optional diversity and inclusion events this year compared to 2021 (-15 percentage points vs. 2021) and overall awareness of staff networks has decreased since 2021, including amongst those more likely to identify as close to their cause. However, more consider them to provide a safe space for colleagues.

We collated diversity demographic data in the 2023 People Survey with the following data:

- **71%** female and **19%** male.
- **46%** of respondents are in the age bracket 35-54.
- **84%** of respondents identify as white British.
- **46%** of respondents have a long term health condition and **38%** have arthritis or another MSK condition.

The implementation of a HR system with capability to track and measure people demographics will support us to be better understand the experiences of our people in 2024/25 and target our diversity and inclusion interventions, resulting in increased diversity across all demographics.



5

Welsh Development Plan

We are proud that our Welsh Language Development Plan was approved by the Welsh Language Commissioner in June 2023. The plan is based on our organisational commitment to ensuring Welsh and English are on an equal footing in Wales and our commitment to ensuring equity of opportunity in access to our services and involvement with our organisation. In addition to our intentions in regard of diversity and inclusion in general, we recognise that language barriers are a potential source of discrimination. We therefore endeavour to eliminate the potential for discrimination

against people who prefer to speak and read Welsh. Should we have to prioritise the use of resources available to us, we will assess needs via a fair and open method, providing the highest level of service to everyone who speak and read Welsh. The implementation of the plan is supported by colleagues in our Welsh Language Group which is made up of staff across the organisation. We also have Welsh Language resources for staff and volunteers who would like to learn Welsh or a couple of phrases. We also developed a guide for hosting events in Wales, plus a guide for Welsh language translation.



Community Involvement Network

We were delighted to launch our Community Involvement Network in 2023. Our Community Involvement Network is a group of organisations who want to work with us to achieve our goal – a future free from arthritis and to better understand and address arthritis related health inequalities. Our commitment to our members include:

- Access to our support services, such as the Helpline, Online Community and Physical Activity resources.
- Quarterly online sessions open to staff, volunteers and people who access your organisation.
- Sharing opportunities and services in our monthly newsletter to our Involvement Network.

We set up the Community Involvement Network as we want to engage with communities which are currently underserved by our organisation. We consider the following people to be underserved

and encourage those working with these groups to join our Community Involvement Network:

- People with long term health conditions
- Culturally diverse communities
- Disability-led organisations
- People from lower socio-economic groups.

In 2024/25 we intend to further grow our Community Involvement Network and increase involvement of people with arthritis from a range of backgrounds through our recently approved payment for involved people procedure.

7

National Institute for Health and Care Research's Race Equality Framework

The mission of NIHR is to improve the health and wealth of the nation through research and we were delighted in 2023 to begin our journey with NIHR's Race Equality Framework. The framework is a self-assessment tool designed to help organisations improve racial equity in health and care research. The purpose of the Framework is to guide organisations in health and care research on their path to racial competence. In so doing, it aspires to eliminate racial inequity in health and care research and to improve equity in health and care outcomes for Black African-, Asian- and Caribbean-heritage communities. Its scope is as follows:

- to provide a model for inclusivity in research
- to increase the recruitment, involvement and participation of Black African-, Asian- and Caribbean-heritage people in research
- to hold researchers and organisations accountable for racial equity.

We recognise under-representation of diverse communities in health and care research and their over-representation in health, care and wider inequality and inequity. Completing the self-assessment will also give us the information, insight and evidence we need to make informed decisions and meet their obligations under the public sector equality duty. By promoting racial equality and equity, we are more likely to find it connect and work with diverse communities, be better at managing risks and make better business decisions—all because of the enhanced insight and problem-solving that diversity brings. Our first steps using the self assessment tool have involved working with University of Edinburgh and whilst we are in the early stages, we hope to report significant progress in 2024/25.

Networks and Champions

We have 5 Staff Networks at Versus Arthritis:

- Race Equity Network
- Disability and Inclusion Network
- LGBTQ+ Equality Network
- Women's Network
- Men's Network

The networks have provided a safe space for colleagues to engage with colleagues with similar backgrounds and interests and hosted several events including Black History Month, Pride Month and health awareness sessions. Each network is working hard to increase membership. Thank you to all our Staff Network members and we look forward to building on your successes in the year ahead.

Inclusion and Wellbeing Champions
In 2023 we refreshed our Inclusion Champions, incorporating wellbeing into the role as we developed a robust wellbeing framework for our people. Over 30 champions help us to continue to build our network of people who are actively progressing

our diversity and inclusion strategy goals in their work by:

- Actively encourage conversations about diversity, inclusion and wellbeing and question the way we do things.
- Promoting, celebrating, and raising awareness of diversity, inclusion and wellbeing within their team.
- Role Modelling inclusive behaviour and managing their own wellbeing, promoting Versus Arthritis' wellbeing tools and resources.
- Keeping colleagues up to date with our diversity, inclusion and wellbeing news and events.
- Continuously learning about diversity, inclusion and wellbeing topics.
- Creating a 'safe space' in which Inclusion and Wellbeing Champions can share their experiences and make suggestions on how to further progress diversity, inclusion and wellbeing across Versus Arthritis.

Our Menopause Support Group

Most of our staff at Versus Arthritis are women aged between 35 and 54 which means a high percentage will be experiencing perimenopause and menopause. Menopausal women are the fastest growing demographic in the workforce and almost eight out of 10 of menopausal women are in work. We are proud to have a Menopause Support Group and developed Menopause Guides

for Staff and Volunteers and Line Managers. We also have an in depth set of menopause resources available to all staff. The Menopause Support Group supplies items for 'emergency menopause kits' in our offices across the four nations 'because these things happen'. We are also members of Henpicked and will be applying for 'Menopause Friendly Employer' status in 2024. We are also signatories of the 'Menopause Workplace Pledge.



Our Approach to Learning and Development

We totally refreshed our approach to learning and development in 2023, with a focus on an inclusive culture of learning and development to support Versus Arthritis to be a great place to work and volunteer. Our approach to learning and development will enhance Versus Arthritis' culture and encourage our people to live our values. A learning culture supports an open mindset, an independent exploration for knowledge, and a shared learning directed towards the mission and strategic goals and objectives of Versus Arthritis. We will develop our learning and development culture by delivering a focussed, accessible and engaging programme that ensures we are a sustainable and vision and values focussed charity and a great place to work and volunteer. These are the key areas that will support us to drive a learning and development culture at Versus Arthritis:

- Aligned to strategic goals
- Identify and address learning needs
- Tailored to audience
- Empowering our managers

- Access to resources and autonomy
- Diverse learning opportunities and flexibility
- Peer Support and social learning opportunities
- Data driven

We will continue to build diversity, inclusion and wellbeing concepts and practices into training courses, management training and teambuilding programmes to increase awareness of the need to handle different views, perceptions and ideas in positive ways. We will also continue to deliver awareness-raising programmes as part of our wider ongoing diversity and inclusion training integrated into continuous professional development (CPD). Through our Management Development Programme to be launched in 2024/25, we will train all leaders and managers to help them understand the issues and drive their support for organisational and operational policies and practices.

Policy, Public Affairs and Engagement

We continue to highlight the impact of and importance of addressing health inequalities as a key cross-cutting theme of our policy and public affairs approach, for example in our written response to Government's consultation on the new Major Conditions Strategy.

Coalition working

We have urged the Government to maintain a commitment to address health inequalities. Versus Arthritis is a member of the Inequalities in Health Alliance (IHA), a coalition of organisations convened by the Royal College of Physicians campaigning for a cross-government strategy to reduce health inequalities. The IHA calls on the Government to:

1. develop a cross-government strategy to reduce health inequalities
2. commence the socio-economic duty, section 1 of the Equality Act 2010 (The socio-economic duty

is key to ensure that the needs of vulnerable people, who can all too often be forgotten, are considered in every decision)

3. adopt a 'child health in all policies' approach.

As a member of the Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance's we have contributed to the development and dissemination of its 'Act Now' inquiry into MSK health inequalities, published in March 2024.

Involvement

We regularly involve people with lived experience in our policy, public affairs and campaigning work. This includes through speaking in front of politicians at our Parliamentary Receptions, through surveys, and through campaigning actions. We are working to improve our processes around involving people with lived experience in our work and aiming to broaden the diversity of the people who are involved in our

work. This includes making sure that the voices of people with arthritis are central to our future policy and campaigning work, and that we specifically look at ‘stories less told’ in line with health inequalities and aim to ensure we have a diversity of experience present in these conversations. This year we held listening sessions to feed into the Government’s Major Conditions Strategy and support the voices of a more diverse group of people being heard in policymaking.

Research

Versus Arthritis invests around £13 million in research every year, and tackling health inequalities is a central pillar of our Research Strategy for 2022/26.¹

¹ Versus Arthritis (2021). Research Strategy 2022/26. Accessed here: <https://www.versusarthritis.org/research/introducing-our-research-strategy/>



Our Commitments



Our Plans for 2024/25

We have made significant progress with our diversity and inclusion in the past three years, and we are a totally different organisation to Versus Arthritis in 2021, with a clear vision, organisational strategy and co-produced values and behaviours and an intersectional calendar of events with a focus on diversity and inclusion and wellbeing. We will take a systemic approach including developing an inclusive culture, inclusive approaches to policies and practices, to personal behaviours, and by managing diversity and inclusion issues in ways that also support delivery of our organisational strategy.

Strategy and governance refresh

We will refresh our 2021/24 diversity and inclusion strategy and fully align it to our organisational strategy and values and behaviours. We will also refresh our diversity and inclusion governance arrangements to ensure 'people voice' is threaded throughout our approach.

Education and engagement

We will continue to build our organisational understanding and awareness of intersectional

diversity, inclusion and antiracism and disability awareness through a calendar of events, training, toolkits and resources. Our programme will support colleagues to feel able to implement diversity and inclusion activities in their role.

Accreditations

We will work towards becoming Disability Confident Leader, Visibly Better Employer, NIHR Race Equality Standard and Menopause Friendly Employer.

Community Involvement Network

We will continue to partner with organisations that work with our underserved communities so that we better identify and address arthritis related health inequalities and connect and reach with our underserved communities.

Data driven recruitment


With full implementation of our HR system, we will better understand the diversity of our people and be data driven in our commitment to increase the diversity our charity.

For more information please visit our website
versusarthritis.org

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