ARTHRITIS & OSTEOPOROSIS TASMANIA
AFTERNOON TEA TO MARK THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE WELLS AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, TUESDAY 17 NOVEMBER 2026

Good afternoon, everyone.

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to Government House as we celebrate a significant milestone: 50 years to the day since the organisation now known as Arthritis & Osteoporosis Tasmania was first incorporated.

I begin by acknowledging the Palawa people as the First Peoples of lutruwita/Tasmania and the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we gather. For countless generations, they have cared for this island, its landscapes, waterways and communities and I am grateful to be able to live here. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and to any Aboriginal people joining us today.

Hosting this afternoon tea is particularly special to me. Through various professional roles, I have had the privilege of working closely with Arthritis & Osteoporosis Tasmania, and especially its CEO, Jackie Slyp, for more than 20 years.

It has been a rewarding relationship, built on a shared commitment to supporting people affected by arthritis, osteoporosis and chronic disease. I have always valued working alongside Jackie and her team, and it is wonderful to celebrate this milestone together.

Most of us give little thought to our bones and joints when they are working well. Like good infrastructure, they quietly support us as we walk, work, care for others and participate in our communities. It is often only when pain or illness affects them that we appreciate just how much depends on them.

For many Tasmanians, this is a daily reality. Arthritis can make even simple tasks painful, while osteoporosis can progress unnoticed until a fracture occurs.

From my background in nursing and public health, I understand that the consequences can extend well beyond the initial diagnosis. A hip fracture, for example, can mean surgery, lengthy rehabilitation and, particularly for older people, a loss of confidence, mobility and independence. Sadly, it can sometimes lead to an early death.

These are not simply matters of bones and joints. They are matters of quality of life: whether someone can remain in their own home, tend a garden, play with grandchildren and stay connected to their community.

This is particularly important in Tasmania, where our population is among the oldest in the nation. Helping people age well, remain active and maintain their independence will be one of our defining public health challenges.

And that has been at the heart of this organisation's work from the very beginning.

In 1976, a group led by Dr, now Professor, Peter Brooks AM and inaugural President David Skegg established the Rheumatism and Arthritis Foundation of Tasmania. Peter is a good friend of Rob's, and I have had the pleasure of getting to know him in recent years. What a wonderful and caring man he is.

From modest beginnings, dedicated volunteers established 30 branches across the State, raised funds to appoint the first Field Officer and Executive Director, introduced warm-water exercise classes and brought some of Australia's earliest arthritis self-management courses to Tasmania.

From the outset, the organisation understood that its role was about more than responding to illness. It was about helping people understand their conditions, manage their health and remain actively involved in their own care.

That philosophy continues today.

Through initiatives such as the Bone Basics Project, osteoporosis education is taken directly into rural communities, helping people understand nutrition, exercise, bone-density testing and treatment. The results are encouraging, with 95 per cent of participants completing both stages reporting a better understanding of osteoporosis and bone health.

The Smoother Movers Strength Training Program is another wonderful example. What began as a trial in the Huon Valley has grown to 28 weekly classes across Tasmania and recently welcomed its 1,000th participant. Behind that milestone are individual stories of people feeling steadier, stronger and more confident, and better able to maintain their independence.

The organisation also supports children and families affected by juvenile arthritis, ensuring their experiences are understood and that they do not feel alone.

Its contribution extends to the health workforce, too. For 20 years, Arthritis & Osteoporosis Tasmania has delivered accredited training through its Course in Management of Musculoskeletal Conditions, the only vocational qualification of its kind on the national training register.
This is an important contribution to better-informed care, particularly in a geographically dispersed State like ours.

More recently, the organisation has helped shape the wider health system by co-hosting the inaugural Tasmanian Musculoskeletal Summit with the Menzies Institute for Medical Research. Bringing together researchers, clinicians, health professionals, government and consumers, the Summit reinforced the importance of collaboration in improving musculoskeletal health.

As we look ahead, the challenge is to build on what began in 1976: making prevention and early intervention more accessible, extending education and support across the State, and ensuring that longer lives are also healthier, stronger and more independent.

Today, I particularly acknowledge the volunteers, past and present, who have generously given their time over the past half-century; the organisation's more than 1,600 members; its donors and supporters; and, of course, the Board, Jackie and her dedicated team.

I recognise that sustaining an organisation like this is not without its challenges. Funding pressures, limited staffing and the demands of supporting a community are very real. Yet the commitment, resilience and passion of those involved continue to shine through.

Reaching 50 years is a remarkable achievement and a testament to the many people who have contributed along the way.

When I became Governor, I committed to championing the many Tasmanians whose valuable work too often flies under the radar. Much like healthy bones and joints, the work of this organisation can be easy to take for granted — until you need it.

Today gives us an opportunity to say clearly that this work is noticed, appreciated and deeply valued.

My warmest congratulations to everyone associated with Arthritis & Osteoporosis Tasmania on 50 years of building strong foundations for the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians.

I have no doubt that the organisation will continue to make a meaningful difference for many years to come.

Thank you, please enjoy the afternoon tea and I look forward to meeting you all.