

Cost-of-living pressures with a lung condition

Measures to ease pressures and
promote health



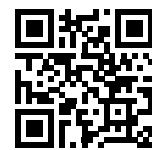
Executive summary and recommendations

Lung Foundation Australia are the peak body for lung health, and we are pleased to represent the views and perspectives of the 1 in 3 Australians living with a lung disease, including lung cancer.

Cost-of-living pressures are impacting people right across Australia. Helping Australians through these pressures is critical, however relief to ease pressures must be delivered responsibly so as not to worsen inflation. Ensuring health is prioritised when Australians are struggling is essential given the social and economic benefits.

In January 2024, Lung Foundation Australia surveyed **over 700 people living with a lung condition** to better understand how cost-of-living pressures are impacting people with lung disease, as well as possible measures for easing current pressures.

Quantitative and qualitative findings from the survey emphasise the significance of this issue for people living with a lung condition. Many are struggling with cost-of-living pressures and turning to strategies that may impact their health in the short- and long-term.



Scan QR code to view full report for **Cost of Living** survey.


We recommend action in the following areas:

- 1 Cheaper medicines, medical equipment, and vaccinations
- 2 More affordable medical appointments and more care in the community
- 3 Affordable allied health and mental health support
- 4 Reduce out-of-pocket costs for tests and scans
- 5 Address travel-related barriers to health care
- 6 Give consideration to other system-level strategies.

Lung Foundation Australia's survey and accompanying report provides new and important data for government and non-government organisations to consider. The impact of these cost-of-living pressures will continue to be felt by people living with a lung condition and the health system supporting them. Lung Foundation Australia is committed to improving lung health and reducing the impact of lung disease for all Australians. We will continue to advocate for policy change and champion equitable access to treatment and care.



Mark Brooke
Chief Executive Officer



Professor Lucy Morgan
Chair, Lung Foundation Australia

4 in 5 people

with a lung condition are impacted by the cost-of-living pressures



Among the 4 in 5 people impacted:

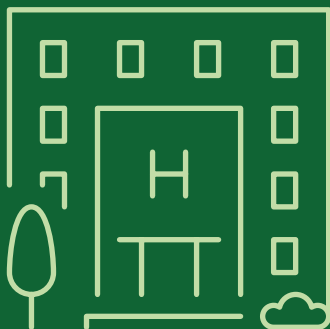


Nearly **1 in 4 people** say that cost-of-living pressures have had a major or severe impact on their ability to manage their lung health



1 in 2 people

with a lung condition are dissatisfied with actions taken by governments to help people with lung disease through the cost-of-living pressures



More than 3 in 4 people

with a lung condition say out-of-pocket costs for their health care or medicines have increased

"...trying to "live" is hard work even without lung disease and the added pressure of the cost of living can be stressful. As my doctors have said, stress and lung disease don't go well together."



"As a mum, you do everything for your kids. ...They come first, and I find sacrificing my medication, my exercise classes, allied health, and mental health sessions now imperative to ensure the children get what they need."



"[I] am as anxious about being able to afford my medical cost as I am to the results of the scans etc."



"I am unable to afford portable oxygen anymore which means that I do not leave home. I am on 24/7 oxygen. This has obviously caused social isolation. I am unable to visit pharmacists, supermarkets, and other places that people take for granted."

"The general rise in the cost of living is causing me great anxiety and as a result I am losing sleep and eating less which is having a negative impact on my mental health, and in turn my lung health is suffering because I am either not using the medications prescribed or I am not looking after myself..."



"I turn my oxygen off during the day when I can to save the electricity costs."



"The sudden spike in electricity prices means that I am reluctant to use the air conditioning even though the recent humidity has increased my breathing difficulties."



"Many required vaccines for immunocompromised patients are very expensive e.g. Shingles, Hep A/B, pneumococcal etc. Financial support would help ease the financial burden."

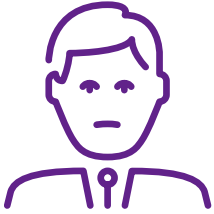
"Transplant medications are a must so I don't miss them, having said that, sometimes I have used out-of-date medications..."





"I wouldn't have to choose whether or not to get a vaccination which isn't on the schedule."

"My 76 yo husband has had to take up some casual work to pay for my medical costs."



"I've not had an appointment with a lung specialist or pulmonary rehab yet because I can't afford it."

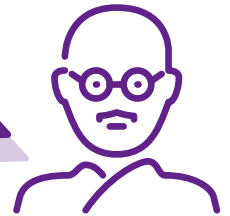


"More [chronic disease] management care plan appointments would enable me to do more physio sessions that are very useful for my breathing issues."

"I definitely have stopped seeing my physiotherapist, dietitian, exercise physiologist, psychologist just to name a few."



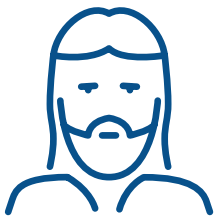
"My sole source of income is the disability support pension. It is inadequate to meet basic expenses like housing, utilities, food, medicine, etc. I am not bad with money, I just don't have enough of it."



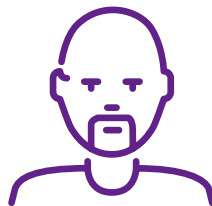
"My lung health has not changed, although cutting back on other things so that I can prioritise health care has meant that I don't feel like I can meaningfully participate in my community. I can't afford to have decent hobbies, and my life feels much more boring and less fulfilling."



"Most of the medication is expensive and I have to decide whether or not to spend the money on it or food."



"...it would be most helpful to be able to talk to a nurse or allied health professional via a telehealth appointment instead of having to travel to and from an appointment..."



"Reducing out-of-pocket expenses for appointments, scans, medicines means they become more affordable and accessible; this allows us to actually go to appointments and take our medicine, which then enables us to have better control of our health conditions and reduces pressure on the health system overall."

Cheaper medicines, medical equipment, and vaccinations

Key statistics



28% had used savings, gone into debt, or sought money through other means to be able to purchase their medicines or medical equipment

14% had used out of date medicines due to cost-of-living pressures

More than 1 in 2 asked for cheaper medicines/medical equipment as one of their top three priorities for relieving healthcare costs

Recommendations

- ▶ Implement and expand initiatives to lower out-of-pocket medicine costs for people living with a lung condition (including the 60-day Prescription Program)
- ▶ Free vaccinations for people living with different lung conditions through the National Immunisation Program when clinically recommended by the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation
- ▶ Improve access to, and information about, oxygen therapy
- ▶ Promote a stepwise approach to pharmacological management of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) in alignment with **evidence-based guidelines** ² to reduce overprescribing and problematic polypharmacy
- ▶ Invest in Lung Foundation Australia's Lung Learning Program - an accredited education program for healthcare professionals that provides multi-modal training on best-practice pharmacological and non-pharmacological treatment of lung conditions
- ▶ Consumers have timely and equitable access to new and novel medicines and services, which is supported by improving the Health Technology Assessment processes for consumer engagement and consumer evidence



"... I have also been unable to afford medicine some fortnights so have gone without, which leads to exacerbations and poor control."



More affordable medical appointments and more care in the community

Key statistics



30%

had cancelled or delayed seeing a GP due to cost-of-living pressures



24%

had cancelled or delayed specialist appointments for their lung condition due to cost-of-living pressures



35%

had used savings, gone into debt, or sought money through other means to be able to see a private specialist for their lung condition



More than 1 in 2

asked for more bulk-billed medical appointments as one of their top three priorities for relieving healthcare costs

Recommendations

- ▶ Increased and equitable access to bulk-billed GP appointments
- ▶ Invest in Lung Foundation Australia's free, evidence-based, telephone Respiratory Care Program, shown to support people with a lung condition to better manage their condition and reduce pressure on primary care
- ▶ Give significant consideration to reforms that will reduce out-of-pocket costs for specialist care, with a particular focus on strategies that promote equitable access

Lung Foundation Australia's Respiratory Care Program

Lung Foundation Australia's telephone-based Respiratory Care Program supports people with lung disease to increase their knowledge, confidence, and skills for effective self-management. The service is well-established, evidence-based, and cost-effective. Find out more at lungfoundation.com.au.



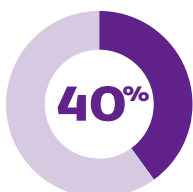
Scan QR code to view the evaluation of the program.

“I can no longer afford to see specialists and often don't even see my GP.”

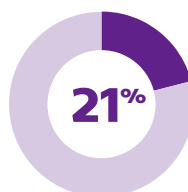


Affordable allied health and mental health support

Key statistics



40% had gone without or cut back on allied health services due to cost-of-living pressures



21% had gone without or cut back on mental health appointments due to cost-of-living pressures

Recommendations

- ▶ Reduce out-of-pocket costs for allied health services and programs that are clinically-recommended for people living with a lung condition
- ▶ Invest in Lung Foundation Australia's free social work telephone service that can provide short-term emotional, practical, and social support to people with a lung condition

Lung Foundation Australia's Social Work Service

Lung Foundation Australia have been providing telephone-based social work services since 2022.

The service empowers consumers with much needed knowledge and support, helping them to navigate their condition in the context of other social factors. Consumers are provided with a 'toolbox' of resources and contacts that can be drawn upon if and when they are needed. Assessments are performed with those who engage in the service to ensure there have been improvements over time.



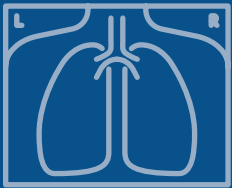
Scan QR code for more information on Lung Foundation Australia's services.



“I stopped physiotherapy and that was pretty much keeping me out of hospital.”

Reduce out-of-pocket costs for tests and scans

Key statistics



18%

had delayed or gone without a test or scan due to cost-of-living pressures



Nearly
1 in 2

asked for reduced out-of-pocket costs for tests and scans as one of their top three priorities for relieving healthcare costs

Recommendations

- ▶ Review out-of-pocket costs for spirometry for COPD and other chronic respiratory conditions
- ▶ Ensure tests and scans, which are often essential to monitor potential disease progression, are made affordable to people living with a lung condition
- ▶ Invest in Lung Foundation Australia's Lung Learning Program - an accredited education program for healthcare professionals that provides training on differential diagnosis of lung conditions to ensure appropriate use of diagnostic tests and referral pathways

Read more about the need for strategies that enhance spirometry access and use for people with COPD under Priority Area 2 of Lung Foundation Australia's COPD Blueprint.



Scan QR code to view
COPD Blueprint.

“

“I have delayed spirometry and CT scans due in the past year and am not using the final part of our savings in order to get them done...”



Address travel-related barriers to health care

Key statistics



Nearly
1 in 4

asked for more funding for medical travel as one of their top three priorities for relieving healthcare costs



Nearly
1 in 5

asked for free telehealth support from a nurse or allied health professional as one of their top three priorities for relieving healthcare costs

Recommendations

- ▶ Explore national standards for patient-assisted travel schemes to enable equitable and affordable access to cancer care
- ▶ Invest in evidence-based telehealth services that provide access to important care and support close to home

Lung Foundation Australia recognise the value of telehealth support services in promoting equitable access to care for Australians living with lung disease.

Our telehealth support services are designed to complement existing health care being received by patients, empowering them with knowledge and skills for better self-management.

For more information on Patient Assisted Travel Schemes available across Australia, visit healthdirect.gov.au/travelling-to-your-healthcare-appointment#financial



“The price of fuel has impacted me when I need to travel over 200kms each round trip to see my lung specialist and other lung related tests.”

Give consideration to other system-level strategies

Key statistics



31% asked for access to affordable home care support as one of their top three priorities for relieving healthcare costs

26% asked for more financial assistance from government as one of their top three priorities for relieving healthcare costs

15% had changed from seeing a private respiratory specialist to the public system due to cost-of-living pressures

12% had cancelled or reduced private health insurance due to cost-of-living pressures

Recommendations

- ▶ Give ongoing consideration to strategies that reduce and prevent poverty and meet basic needs
- ▶ Keep the annual private health insurance premium increase as low as possible while cost of living is high, and consider additional strategies to incentivise policy retention



“I am fortunate to have private health insurance but that is very expensive and does not fully reimburse me for things such as scans.”



Lung Foundation Australia

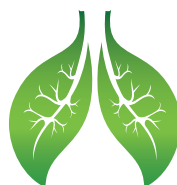
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