

# Improving lung health for South Australians

Lung Foundation Australia's submission for the  
South Australian budget 2025-2026

**Lung Foundation Australia is Australia's leading peak body for respiratory health and lung disease. We fund life-changing research and deliver support services to enable Australians with lung disease, including lung cancer, to live their best lives.**

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*South Australians at the Shine a Light walk for lung cancer awareness, a fundraiser and community event facilitated by Lung Foundation Australia, Adelaide, 10 November 2024*

# Recommendations at a glance

## 1. \$390,000\*/year for a Specialist Lung Cancer Nurse for Central Adelaide Local Health Network and for Regional Cancer Services Local Health Network



An SA public hospital misses an optimal care target with no SLCN on their care team



In the 7 months to June 24, the new LFA SA SLCNs gave best practice care to 660 patients

## 2. \$250,000\*/year, for three years, to co-fund our telephone-delivered Respiratory Care Program to support South Australians living with COPD



COPD is South Australia's #2 leading cause of potentially preventable hospitalisations



Our Respiratory Care Program was associated with a 32% decline in emergency visits

## 3. \$150,000\* to improve access to quality long COVID information to support more South Australian patients and their treating healthcare professionals



South Australia is a clinical leader in long COVID but access to support is variable



Our Understanding long COVID booklet is respected by patients & health professionals

## 4. Appropriate resourcing and investment to support local, South Australian implementation of the National Lung Cancer Screening Program



Lung cancer five-year survival is low compared to all the other common cancers



The National Lung Cancer Screening Program starts July 2025 – it will save SA lives

\* Full budget available on request

## \$390,000/year, for a Specialist Lung Cancer Nurse for the Central Adelaide Local Health Network and for the SA Regional Cancer Services LHN

South Australia was the first state to formally partner with Lung Foundation Australia (LFA) to recruit specialist lung cancer nurses (SLCNs) that support lung cancer patients at metropolitan public hospitals. The nurses practice across Royal Adelaide Hospital (RAH) and The Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH) [CALHN], Flinders Medical Centre [SALHN] and Lyell McEwin Hospital [NALHN].

Multidisciplinary team (MDT) meetings are gold standard practice for treating lung cancer patients and should include an SLCN. Mount Gambier and Districts Health Service is the only SA public hospital that does not have a SLCN in their MDT. Further, the one LFA SLCN for CALHN can only attend QEH once a week due to heavy patient load at RAH – a SLCN for QEH is urgently needed. Funding two SLCNs will ensure CALHN and Regional Cancer Services LHN deliver optimal care.



SA Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Hon. Chris Picton MP with the SA LFA SLCNs (and Specialist Respiratory Care Nurse), Royal Adelaide Hospital, March 12, 2024.

The nurses commenced in November 2023, and to 30 June 2024 they had almost 2,000 interactions with 660 South Australians who had suspected or confirmed lung cancer.

SLCNs are often the only person to have met the patient prior to the MDT meetings. They understand a patient's physical and psychosocial status, supportive care needs and personal preferences. They advocate for their patients, ensuring their needs are met and that MDT actions are followed. Every week the South Australian SLCNs attend up to five lung cancer MDT meetings.

The total number of new patients supported by the SA LFA SLCNs since November 2023 was over half the annual number of lung cancer diagnoses in South Australia (an estimated 1,131 in 2023).<sup>1</sup> While this number includes some patients who were not found to have lung cancer, it shows that the SLCNs are providing specialist support to a large number of South Australians living with lung cancer. Funding for two additional SLCNs will mean that more South Australians will have equitable access to the care they deserve no matter where their treating hospital is located.

***“Knowing that my specialist nurse was working away in the background pushing the referrals and appointments gave me time to fall apart, and pull myself together, so I could tell my family here and overseas [about diagnosis].”*** A South Australian lung cancer patient receiving SLCN care

<sup>1</sup> AIHW 2024. Cancer data in Australia

## \$250,000/year, for three years, to help fund our telephone-delivered Respiratory Care Program to support South Australians living with COPD

COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) describes chronic lung diseases characterised by obstructed airflow. Breathlessness is the key symptom. There is no cure, but good management slows progression. Lung Foundation Australia have supported Australians living with COPD for over 30 years through the provision of information and support services, advocacy for increased health and community care investment, and championing innovation in treatment.

### The impact of COPD in South Australia<sup>1</sup>

**Deaths:** 651 in 2023 (fifth leading disease-specific cause)

**Prevalence:** 47,300 South Australians in 2022 (more than cancer)

**Health system expenditure:** \$68 million in 2020-21 (55% in public hospitals)

**Potentially preventable hospitalisations:** Second leading cause in 2022-23



Our Respiratory Care Program aims to improve patient engagement with their healthcare teams, and uptake of self-management strategies. It comprises three clinician-led telephone appointments over four to six months, with a follow-up call 12 months after the final session. A key focus is identifying gaps in evidence-based care as provided in the Australian and New Zealand Guidelines for the Management of COPD.

Evaluation outcomes of interest for state-funded healthcare includes: program completion was associated with a statistically significant 32% decrease in emergency department visits for clients who had completed the program by September 2024. Since 2019, 82 South Australians have been clients of our Program for COPD. A further 23 have been clients of our Program for bronchiectasis.

Naomi, a South Australian living with COPD, a Program client, and a Lung Foundation Australia consumer advocate, explains the value of the Respiratory Care Program: **“The things that have helped me manage my COPD are the supports given through the Lung Foundation – they gave me the tools to be able to help myself.”** Our Program increases participant's confidence to manage their disease and improve their quality of life.

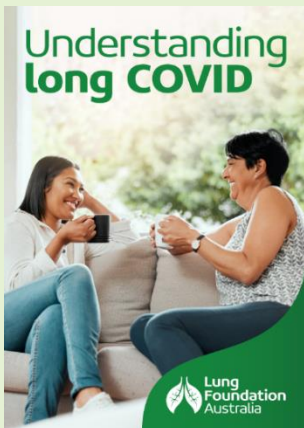
This free-to-consumer service is an example of care in the community that complements primary care and reduces emergency presentations. We note that the 2024-25 South Australian Budget includes a target of 8% potentially preventable hospitalisations; and that six out of the 10 Local Health Networks exceeded this target in 2023-2024.

<sup>1</sup> ABS 2024 Causes of Death, Australia; ABS 2023 National Health Survey; AIHW 2023 Health system spending on disease and injury in Australia, 2020-21; AIHW 2023 Admitted patient safety and quality

## \$150,000 to improve access to quality long COVID information for South Australian patients

COVID-19 continues to burden South Australia. There have been over 40,000 notified cases to November 5 this year, and 441 South Australians died from the virus in 2023.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that five to 10 percent of people with a COVID-19 infection may develop long COVID.<sup>2</sup> However, it is very challenging to estimate the true prevalence of long COVID as many people are managed in primary care where there is currently no mechanism for capturing diagnoses.

Lung Foundation Australia partnered with consumers and key opinion leaders to develop the [Understanding long COVID booklet](#). It is a recommended resource on [Healthdirect](#). The booklet has been in high demand and has received high praise for its comprehensiveness and disease agnostic approach. However, without support from the Government, the resource will not reach all South Australians in need of accessible information on long COVID.



We seek funding to expand access to this highly commended, co-designed resource. Dissemination activities would be informed by consultation with existing partners.

**Activities could include:**

- printed copies, especially for primary care settings
- developing infographics based on the booklet
- translation and dissemination of culturally appropriate resources for non-English speaking background patients
- other strategies based on the needs of the community.

The resource was developed with the input of 20 healthcare professionals and consumers. The healthcare professionals included respiratory specialists, psychologists, physiotherapists, nurses, a speech pathologist and a GP. It contains information on symptoms, management tips, and tips for making the most of healthcare appointments.

South Australian epidemiologist Professor Adrian Esterman advised in August 2024 that: "We know that there are approximately 35,000 South Australians with long COVID — at least that many, and what concerns me is we have very few services available to treat it."<sup>3</sup> SA Health rightly note that "not all patients with long COVID symptoms require the level of care provided through a long COVID clinic". For these patients, having access to the *Understanding long COVID* booklet, and discussing this with a healthcare professional, may be appropriate.

<sup>1</sup> DoHAC 2024. National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System; ABS 2024. Causes of Death, Australia

<sup>2</sup> AIHW 2022. Long COVID in Australia – a review of the literature.

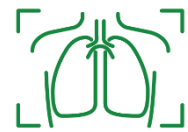
<sup>3</sup> Walters A, Kimberley J. South Australia leads in POTS research, but Australia is behind in diagnosing the disorder. ABC Riverland. 2024. [POTS, Postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome is common in long COVID]

# Appropriate resourcing and investment to support South Australian implementation of the National Lung Cancer Screening Program

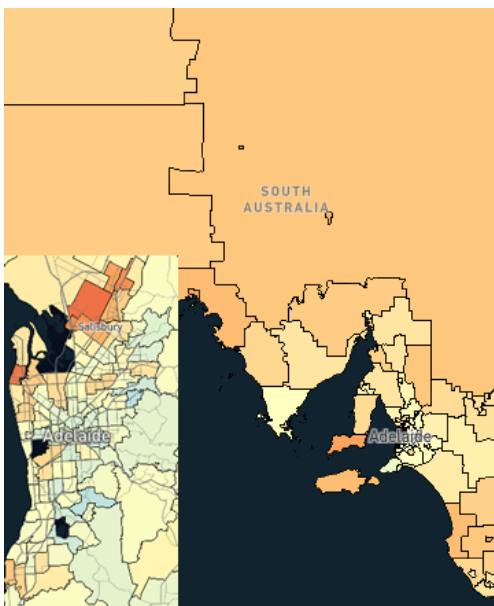
When lung cancer is detected early, survival rates and quality of life are dramatically improved. The National Lung Cancer Screening Program is the first new national cancer screening program in nearly 20 years and will commence in July 2025. The program provides an opportunity for early detection and early intervention and is predicted to save more than 500 Australian lives every year.

## The impact of lung cancer in South Australia<sup>1</sup>

**Deaths:** 703 in 2023 (the third leading disease-specific cause)  
**Incidence:** 1,131 estimated in 2023 (the fourth most diagnosed cancer)  
**Health system expenditure:** \$48 million in 2020-21 (fifth most costly cancer)



Comprehensive and timely implementation of the National Lung Cancer Screening Program means that people at high risk of lung cancer will have the prospect of earlier diagnosis and treatment, therefore reducing the burden on patients, their families, the health system, and the community. We urge the South Australian Government to commit to increasing support and investment towards the implementation of the Program in South Australia. Investment will ensure that the healthcare workforce is appropriately equipped to support residents who have their lung cancer diagnosed earlier as a result of this life-saving program.



Data from the Australian Cancer Atlas<sup>2</sup> shows that in 2018-2019 the average annual percent of Australians who were alive five years after being diagnosed with lung cancer (survival rate) was 28.1%.

This map of South Australia by Statistical Area Level 2 shows areas of the state where the survival rate was better (blue) or worse (orange) than the Australian average. Largs Bay and Salisbury North had the poorest survival rate in the state, with their rates 24% lower than the Australian average.

Data like this can inform state implementation of the National Lung Cancer Screening Program and address survival rate inequity.

<sup>1</sup> ABS 2024 Causes of Death, Australia; SA Government 2024 SA Cancer Registry; AIHW 2023 Health system spending on disease and injury in Australia, 2020-21

<sup>2</sup> Australian Cancer Atlas 2024. <https://atlas.cancer.org.au/atlas>

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