

# Improving lung health for Victorians

Lung Foundation Australia's submission to the Victorian Budget 2025-2026

# About Lung Foundation Australia

Lung Foundation Australia is the only charity and leading peak body of its kind in Australia that funds life-changing research and delivers support services that give hope to people living with lung disease or lung cancer. Since 1990, we have been working to ensure lung health is a priority for all, from promoting lung health and early diagnosis, advocating for policy change and research investment, raising awareness about the symptoms and prevalence of lung disease, and championing equitable access to treatment and care.

There are over 30 different types of lung disease currently impacting **1 in 3 Australians**. Lung disease and lung cancer are leading causes of death in Victoria, but they have consistently been underfunded compared to other prominent diseases. The burden and inequity of lung disease and lung cancer in Victoria highlights the need for the government to **fund prevention efforts as well as improved services for those already living with a respiratory disease**.

We work to reduce the impact of lung disease and lung cancer and protect the lung health of the community more broadly. In 2024, The Hon. Mary-Anne Thomas MP, Minister for Health, officially opened our Melbourne office, which we hope to be a start to a thriving presence in Victoria. In Victoria, we have:

- contributed to multiple public health consultations,
- raised awareness and educated the community through multiple campaigns, including our annual National Silicosis Prevention and Awareness campaign: [Another One Fights The Dust](#)
- offered a suite of free health education resources on a range of lung health topics – e.g., our interactive online module on vaping and young people
- supported 218 Victorians with COPD and 112 Victorians with bronchiectasis through our free clinician-led Respiratory Care Program
- facilitated access to lung disease peer support groups (40 online and 4 face-to-face groups available in Victoria)
- support 6 'Lungs In Action' groups (exercise maintenance classes for people living with chronic lung disease),
- And much more!

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We welcome the opportunity to discuss this budget proposal with you further. **To discuss this further please contact Mark Brooke, CEO, on [markb@lungfoundation.com.au](mailto:markb@lungfoundation.com.au) or 0417 076 090.**

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Photo: Victorians at Lung Foundation Australia's 'Shine a Light for Lung Cancer' Awareness Walk, Melbourne, 9 November 2024

# Our recommendations to improve the lung health of Victorians

1

**\$1.2m per year, for four years, to increase access to Specialist Lung Cancer Nurses in Victoria.**



Lung cancer is a leading cause of burden of disease in Victoria.



Lung Foundation Australia's lung cancer nurse service improves a variety of patient outcomes.

2

**\$650,000 per year, for four years, to help fund our clinician-led Respiratory Care Program to support Victorians living with COPD.**



COPD is a leading cause of preventable hospitalisations in Victoria.



Our Respiratory Care Program reduces hospitalisations and ED presentations.

3

**\$350,000 to help fund the development of resources on air pollution to build the climate resilience of Victorians.**



Even low levels of air pollution poses a significant threat to the lung health of Victorians.



Information and resources are needed to build the climate resilience of Victorians.

4

**\$900,000 to help fund the development of e-cigarette resources for young adults.**



E-cigarette use by young people has increased significantly over the last few years.



Resources are needed to empower young adults to navigate the new regulations and make healthy decisions.

5

**Support local implementation of the National Lung Cancer Screening Program.**



Lung cancer is the #1 cause of cancer death in Victoria



Early detection is vital, and the new Program will save Victorian lives.

Full budget for each of our recommendations is available on request

## \$1.2m per year, for four years, to increase access to Specialist Lung Cancer Nurses in Victoria

### Lung cancer in Victoria

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in Australia. Of the 5 most common cancers in Australia, lung cancer has the lowest survival rate (26%) with the next lowest being 71% (colorectal cancer)<sup>1</sup>. Lung cancer disproportionately impacts people experiencing social and economic hardship, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people in regional, rural and remote areas of Victoria<sup>2,3,4</sup>. Many lung cancer patients experience critical delays in diagnosis and commencement of treatment<sup>5</sup>.

↑ Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in Victoria<sup>4</sup>

↓ There is a deficit of >20 lung cancer nurses in Victoria



There is a significant gap in care and shortage of specialist nurses for people living with lung cancer compared to other leading cancers. Specialist lung cancer nurses are needed to address inequities in access. Access for Victorians living with lung cancer is limited. Best practice care is one nurse per 100 cancer patients. However, in Victoria, there are currently only 11 lung cancer nurses to meet the need of the 3,269 Victorians who were diagnosed with lung cancer (in 2022)<sup>6</sup>, and the many others already living with lung cancer. With the National Lung Cancer Screening Program rolling out in June 2025, this number will rise even further.

There is an insufficient number of lung cancer nurses in Victoria to meet the needs of the community, particularly for residents living and seeking treatment outside of Melbourne, Geelong, or Ballarat. Furthermore, we have identified that the following hospitals have a Lung Cancer multi-disciplinary team but no designated Specialist Lung Cancer Nurses, this means patients are not being provided optimal care at: Austin Hospital; Bendigo Hospital; Box Hill Hospital; Epworth Hospital; Frankston Hospital; Goulburn Valley Health; Latrobe Regional Hospital; Cabrini Hospital; Warrnambool Hospital.

### Lung Foundation Australia's Lung cancer nurse service

Lung Foundation Australia's Specialist Lung Cancer Nurses are highly skilled advanced practice nurses, who provide lung-specific cancer care, information and support to optimise care for people living with lung cancer. These specialist nurses support patients at every step of the lung cancer pathway, and uniquely from the investigation and diagnostic phase. They work in a multi-disciplinary team and are the consistent link between the individual and the healthcare teams who provide treatment. Best-practice guidelines state that specialist lung cancer nurses should be core members of multidisciplinary teams caring for people with lung cancer.

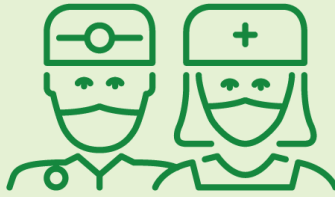
#### The Lung Foundation Australia's Specialist Lung Cancer Nurse service is evidence-based and cost-effective



- 75% less likely to presents at an emergency department.
- Increased receipt of anticancer therapy due to patients' improved health status and thus eligibility for treatment.
- Reduced wait times from referral to treatment, improving the potential for better overall health outcomes.
- If 100 of these nurses were funded in Australia, this would deliver \$18 million in health savings.
- 100% of participants were satisfied with Lung Foundation Australia's Lung Cancer Support Nurse Service
- 100% of participants felt the Lung Foundation Australia's Lung Cancer Support Nurse Service provided them with helpful information and options to manage issues they are experiencing

# Priority

## 1



Expanding Lung Foundation Australia's Specialist Lung Cancer Nurse service will contribute to better health outcomes and quality of life for more Victorians affected by lung cancer and ensure equitable health access in regional and remote areas. As such, we are advocating for an investment of \$1.2million per year to fund these local nurses.



"In the early stages of my chemo, the cancer care nurse would ring weekly to see how I was going and what side effects I was having and was able to give me some answers to cope with these. I found this really helpful."

"[The nurse] was very kind sympathetic and answered all my questions and suggested what I should do. Calling the Lung foundation for help is the best thing I have done to help me in my current situation. Each time I spoke to [the nurse] gave me a new hope and made me stronger and encouraged to keep going and fight this disease."



"Once I was diagnosed, the lung cancer nurse consultant met with me, had all the paperwork and information ready for Centrelink, had medical info sheets ready too, and I was able to call her about anything, or text her any questions. She would touch base with me and talk to me about anything and everything that was on my mind."

"I cannot express how much I have benefited from my discussions with [the nurse]. I learnt so much on how to cope with side effects of my treatment and always felt there was someone there for assistance if needed. Thank you so much for providing this service for Lung Cancer patients, it means so much."



"Just having someone check in is invaluable. It's good to have someone who understands not just cancer but the actual disease I have. Very much appreciated. There should be more nurses. We need more lung cancer nurses. There should be more funding for this type of support."

"[The nurse] is compassionate and very knowledgeable. I enjoy the time chatting with Julie and find not only the call but information provided via email very beneficial. I appreciate Julie's time and thank the Lung Foundation Australia for providing this free invaluable service to patients all over Australia."



## \$650,000 per year, for four years, to help fund our clinician-led Respiratory Care Program to support Victorians living with COPD

### COPD in Victoria

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a term that describes a range of conditions caused by obstructed airflow, including emphysema, chronic bronchitis, and chronic asthma. COPD is a progressive, long-term lung condition that leads to increasing breathing difficulty, disability, and premature death. COPD results from long-term exposure to irritants, most often cigarette smoke, but also occupational hazards and air pollution. Other risk factors are genetics, prenatal events, low birth weight, and frequent respiratory infections.

COPD represents a significant burden to Victorians living with the disease and the Victorian health system. The high number of preventable hospital admissions alone puts enormous pressure on an already stretched health system in Victoria.

### The impact of COPD in Victoria

**Deaths:** 1,670 in 2023

**Prevalence:** 137,700 Victorians in 2022

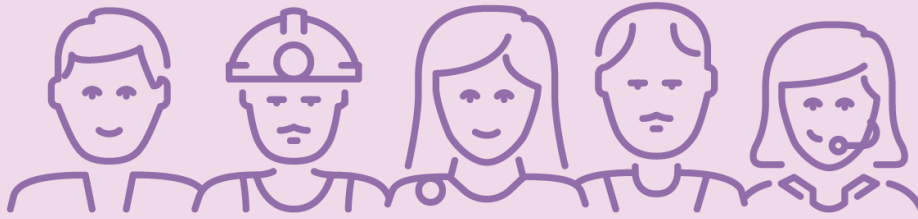
**Health system expenditure:** \$212 million in 2020-21

**Potentially preventable hospitalisations:** sixth leading cause in 2022-23 with 17,041 hospitalisations in Victoria

**Inequitable distribution:** prevalence, rate of burden, rate of hospitalisations, and mortality rates are disproportionately higher among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people living in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage, and those living in remote areas.



Although not fully reversible, COPD is treatable and better management of COPD can **reduce exacerbations that lead to preventable hospitalisations**<sup>7</sup>. 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.



## Lung Foundation Australia's Respiratory Care Program

Our Respiratory Care Program, which is evidence-based and cost-effective, supports people across Victoria living with a respiratory disease to better manage their condition and avoid unnecessary hospital admissions. The program comprises of three clinician-led telephone appointments over four to six months, with a follow-up call 12 months after the final session.

### Benefits of Lung Foundation Australia's Respiratory Care Program

- Free to consumers
- Evidence-based and cost-effective
- Reduces hospitalisations and emergency department presentations
- Provides equitable access via a telehealth model
- Since 2019, 218 Victorians living with COPD, and 112 with bronchiectasis have been clients of our Program
- 99% of participants were satisfied with the program

### Improved management of lung condition

In March–April 2024, Lung Foundation Australia conducted research to better understand the lived experiences of those living with or caring for people with a lung disease or lung cancer. People who had engaged with Lung Foundation Australia's information or support services were significantly more likely to use a range of strategies to manage their lung condition, including but not limited to:

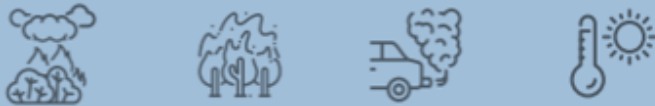
- keeping vaccinations up-to-date (75% vs 66%)
- using breathing techniques for breathlessness (52% vs 42%)
- using energy conservation techniques (47% vs 33%)
- using airway clearance techniques (40% vs 29%)
- and having a written action plan (28% vs 18%)

**“The level of anxiety and feeling of being alone is so great before you get to a service like the Lung Foundation nurses where all of a sudden, you're validated, you're heard, you feel like a person again. And once you feel those things, you're able to absorb the information of how to help yourself. People like the Lung Foundation Nurses, it's almost like they give you back your life. They give you back the ability to take control and move forward.”**



**“When I became ill a year ago, my GP wasn't very helpful, and my respiratory physician was on long service leave. Finding the Lung Foundation online and being able to talk to the respiratory nurse was an enormous relief and enormous help in understanding what was going on.”**

## \$350,000 to help fund the development of resources on air pollution to build the climate resilience of Victorians



### Air quality in Victoria

Air pollution is the contamination of the outdoor environment by a chemical, physical, or biological agent which modifies natural air quality of the atmosphere<sup>8</sup>. Air

pollution consists of many different chemicals and gases which can cause adverse effects on human health, making it a significant public health issue. Climate change is one of the main contributors of air pollution, with greenhouse gases from the combustion of fossil fuels, and higher temperatures causing an increase in the presence of allergens and harmful air pollutants<sup>9</sup>. Climate change is leading to more frequent and severe weather changes<sup>10,11,12</sup>, which in turn leads to increases in harmful smoke and mould in the air and impacts the quality of air Australians are breathing. Victoria's air quality is also vulnerable to experiencing short-term extreme air pollution events, such as wildfires and dust storms, which can temporarily cause Victorians to be exposed to extremely poor air quality<sup>13</sup>.

**There is no safe level of air pollution**, exposure to even low levels of air pollution poses a significant threat to the lung health of Australians<sup>14</sup>, and those living with a lung disease or lung cancer are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of air pollution<sup>15</sup>. We need to do more to support the one in three Australians living with a lung disease and protect the lung health of the community more broadly.

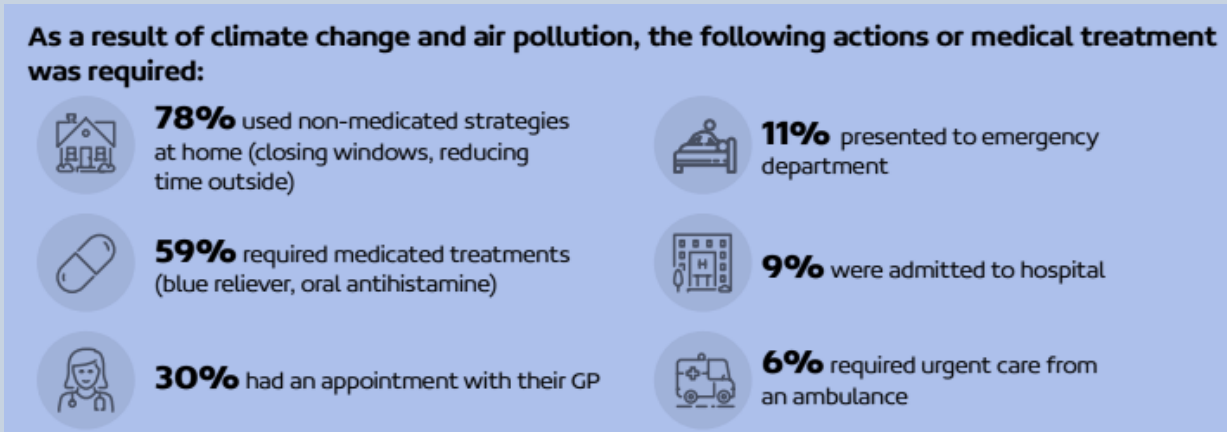
### The impact of air pollution

- In 2019, **air pollution was the fourth leading risk factor for death globally**<sup>16</sup>.
- Even low levels of air pollution increases the risk of illness and death from major diseases such as lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and lower-respiratory infections (such as pneumonia)<sup>17</sup>.
- In Australia it is estimated that 2600 people die from air pollution each year, with the presence of air pollutants such as particulate matter 2.5 being one of the main pollutants leading to premature mortality<sup>18</sup>.
- In Australia, the estimated financial cost of premature deaths due to air pollution ranges from roughly \$11 billion to \$24 billion per year<sup>19</sup>.
- Certain populations are disproportionately vulnerable to the exposure and/or impacts of climate change - such as those living with pre-existing lung conditions, pregnant women, elderly, children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and socio-economically disadvantaged communities in Australia<sup>20,21,22,23</sup>.



## Victorians need information and guidance to better manage poor air quality

In 2023 Lung Foundation Australia carried out a survey with people in Australia living with a lung disease or lung cancer<sup>24</sup>. We found that the results of climate change and air pollution were having a significant impact on people's lives, including a reduction in quality of life and the need for additional medical treatment. Only 14% felt extremely confident in managing symptoms when air pollution is high. Less than half said they had been able to find helpful guidance or resources on air pollution and living with a lung disease. Correspondingly, **over half** of the respondents said they **wanted further resources and guidance** on air pollution and living with a lung disease.



“Enduring smoke from bushfires and burning-off (controlled burning/fuel reduction burning) is a major concern. My chest can tighten, not unlike imagining it wrapped in barbed wire...”



“I rarely leave my home anymore for fear of poor air quality days, which cause me to have anxiety fear and stress which I never really had beforehand. I feel my quality of life has greatly reduced... People without lung diseases don't seem to understand.”

One in three Australians are living with lung disease and evidence has shown that air pollution plays an important role in the onset and exacerbation of their symptoms<sup>25,26,27</sup>. Thus, those who live with a lung disease require dedicated support that focuses on their unique circumstances and address their individual needs. There is a need to develop tailored resources that provides guidance on living with a lung disease in the face of poor air quality. The health information provided should be easily accessible and provide clear guidance on developing an action plan, how to protect themselves, practical actions they can take to reduce exposure, and when to seek medical assistance.

Further, we recommend the Victorian Government invest in developing resources which will build the climate resilience of Victorians and safeguard future generations from the impacts of climate change. Poor air quality can impact anyone, and with an increase in occurrence and intensity of natural disasters, the need to build climate resilience has never been more pertinent. Improving the public's climate risk management can be done by developing evidence-based, easily accessible information that can be available and disseminated in advance, during, and after climate emergencies.

Lung Foundation Australia are well placed as the leading peak body in lung health to develop and disseminate resources to people with lung disease.

# \$900,000 to help fund the development of e-cigarette resources for young adults to empower them to make healthy decisions

## E-cigarettes in Victoria

E-cigarette use has increased significantly over the last few years, creating a new public health crisis, particularly among young people.



**! In Victoria a staggering 77,200 Victorian adults, who have previously never smoked, took up vaping in the last three years alone. More than half of these Victorians were under 25 years old.**

Evidence continues to emerge on the physical and mental health harms from vaping including lung injury, mouth and airway irritation, persistent cough, burns, nicotine addiction, increased anxiety, and more. In addition, young people who vape are 5x times more likely to take up cigarette smoking than those who do not<sup>28</sup>. We are witnessing a new generation of young people inhaling harmful chemicals, addicted to nicotine, and needing support.

We recognise that the vaping reforms that passed in 2024 will have a marked impact on reducing use of e-cigarettes and will ultimately work to protect young people from these harmful products, and we strongly support these efforts. However, with a rapidly changing policy environment, and evidence-continuing to emerge around best practice prevention, cessation and support, there is a need for additional information and resources.

## Address gaps in e-cigarette resources and information for young adults

With the changing regulations and rise in e-cigarette use by young adults, there is a need to expand available resources to young adults and ensure up-to-date information is provided. Lung Foundation Australia has a strong track record of producing accurate, high quality, and co-designed resources on e-cigarettes and we would like to expand these resources into new content areas and ensure up-to-date information is provided in this rapidly changing space.

Lung Foundation Australia's e-cigarette factsheets are some of our most in demand and viewed resources and our free [vaping e-learning module](#) has had over 5,300 people register. Lung Foundation Australia's e-cigarette resources have been very well received and are promoted and used by Federal and State Health and Education departments, schools across the country, state health promotion units, Tackling Indigenous Smoking units, and public health NGO's.

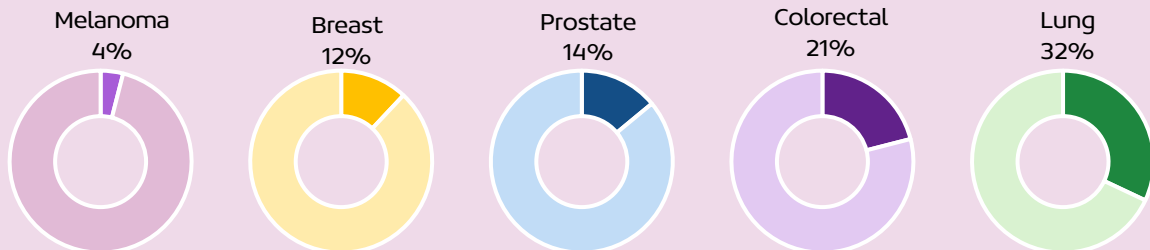


In addition to our [Unveil What You Inhale](#) suite of resources, our more recent resources include our co-designed [animated short videos, and factsheet](#) for First Nations young people, factsheets on the [environmental impacts of e-cigarettes](#), and [vaping and mental health](#). We understand the need to speak to a wide audience when addressing vaping, which is why we take a coordinated approach and provide resources, information and support to [young people](#), their [parents and carers](#), and [educators](#).

## Support lung cancer screening implementation

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in Victoria. Many lung cancer patients experience critical delays in diagnosis and commencement of treatment which can reduce survival rate<sup>29</sup>.

Mortality rate for the 5 most common cancers in Victoria<sup>30</sup>



When lung cancer is detected early, survival rate 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 screening by July 2025. The program provides an opportunity for early detection and early intervention for people with lung cancer. This program is predicted to save more than 500 Australian lives each year by diagnosing cancers at an earlier stage<sup>31</sup>.

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 of lung cancer on patients, their families, the health system, and the community. We urge the Victorian Government to commit to increasing support and investment towards the implementation of the Program in Victoria. Investment will ensure that the workforce and system are upskilled and appropriately equipped to support Victorians who have their lung cancer diagnosed earlier as a result of this life-saving program.

**500+ lives a year will be saved with the new screening program**

**“We need funding. Lung cancer and other conditions are often not discovered until it’s too late. Quality of life is compromised; treatment is less effective.”**



**“I would tell [the person responsible for funding our healthcare system] about the importance of early detection and how an early diagnosis could mean a better prognosis which would mean less strain on an already overwhelmed healthcare system.”**

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