

Improving Lung Health for the People of Victoria

Lung Foundation Australia's submission to the Victorian
Budget 2026-2027

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.

Lung Foundation Australia achievements, 2023-24:



1,039,117 people connected with resources, support services and programs through our website



1,868 telephone-based appointments with a nurse or social worker

4,262

health-related enquiries to Information and Support Centre



3,042

healthcare professional registrations for learning sessions



65+

government submissions for life-saving treatments, new medicines and policy change



3,350 earned media stories about lung health reached 1.01 billion



94,963 people accessed our online Lung Health Checklist – resulting in 229 people seeing their GP and 85 reporting receiving a lung health diagnosis



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

LFA's priorities that will improve lung health for the people of Victoria

1

\$1.7m 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.



Our SLCNs enable timely access to support, diagnosis and treatment, improving outcomes for patients and reducing burden on the health system.

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 guidance is needed to build the climate resilience of Victorians.

4

\$180,000 per year, for 2 years, to fund a Lung Cancer Screening Priority Populations Engagement Officer based in Victoria.



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



Early detection is vital, and increasing participation in screening will save lives.

5

\$350,000 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 make healthy decisions.

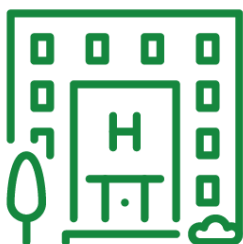
Full budget for each of our recommendations is available on request. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this budget proposal with you further. **To discuss this further please contact Mark Brooke, CEO, on markb@lungfoundation.com.au or 0417 076 090.**

\$1.7m per year, for four years, to increase access to Specialist Lung Cancer Nurses in Victoria

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in Victoria and across Australia^{4,5}. Lung cancer has by far the lowest survival rate compared to other common cancers². Lung cancer disproportionately impacts people experiencing social and economic disadvantage, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people in regional, rural and remote areas of Victoria⁶⁻⁹.

Many lung cancer patients experience critical delays in diagnosis and commencement of treatment¹³. People with lung cancer face several barriers to effectively managing their condition, in particular, the diagnostic pathway is particularly **long, fragmented, and difficult to navigate**. Even before a diagnosis is reached, patients undergo multiple, complex investigations. In many cases, this process can take three months or more, **delaying access to necessary treatment and negatively impacting patient outcomes**.

There is a pressing need to address these inadequacies in care. With the launch of the National Lung Cancer Screening Program in July 2025, there will be an **increase in lung cancers detected**, particularly at earlier stages when treatment can be more effective. While the new screening program is a major step forward in addressing the burden of lung cancer, it will place additional pressure on respiratory services, particularly during the diagnostic and staging phases. It is essential that screening efforts are supported by timely and coordinated diagnosis and treatment. Without the right workforce in place, there is a risk that system bottlenecks will undermine the benefits of early detection.



The Optimal Care Pathway for lung cancer care delivery states that Specialist lung cancer nurses should be core members of multidisciplinary teams caring for people with lung cancer. There is an **insufficient number of specialised lung cancer nurses in Victoria** to meet the needs of the community.

We have identified that the following hospitals have a lung cancer multi-disciplinary team but no designated Specialist Lung Cancer Nurse, this means patients are not being provided optimal care at:

- Ballarat Health Service
- Barwon Health University Hospital
- Bendigo Hospital
- Box Hill Hospital
- Epworth Hospital
- Cabrini Hospital
- Warrnambool Hospital
- An additional nurse is also needed at Royal Melbourne Hospital to meet the demand.

To address this gap, Lung Foundation Australia are seeking investment of \$1.7m per year, for four years, for 8 Specialist Lung Cancer Nurses in Victoria.

Lung cancer is the #1 cause of cancer death in Victoria¹⁻³



- More than 3,300 Victorians were diagnosed with lung cancer in 2020
- More than 2,180 Victorians died from lung cancer in 2023
- Lung cancer cost Victoria \$362 million in health system costs in 2022-23

Lung Foundation Australia's Specialist Lung Cancer Nurses

Lung Foundation Australia's Specialist Lung Cancer Nurses are highly skilled advanced practice registered nurses with lung cancer specific knowledge and skills. These nurses deliver evidence-based care under Lung Foundation Australia's established Specialist Lung Cancer Nurse Model of Care. They work across the lung cancer care pathway, with a particular focus on pre-diagnosis, diagnosis and post-treatment survivorship, in response to evidence that greatest unmet patient need occurs at these stages of the pathway. Lung Foundation Australia's evidence-informed model uniquely positions nurses within Respiratory Medicine, where people with suspected lung cancer first present.

Involvement of a specialist lung cancer nurse leads to¹⁰⁻¹³:

- ✓ Improves patient access to needed treatment
- ✓ Reduces wait times from referral to treatment
- ✓ Reduces avoidable emergency department presentations
- ✓ Improves patients' capacity to self-manage symptoms
- ✓ Improves patients' cancer outcomes, quality of life and wellbeing



8 nurses = >\$8 million saved every year in net benefits*

The Federal Government have funded the McGrath Foundation to recruit and place specialist cancer nurses across the country as part of the Australian Cancer Nursing and Navigation Program. However, existing funding models—including the McGrath Foundation model of care—are typically limited to patients with a confirmed cancer diagnosis, and do not provide support during the critical diagnostic work-up phase. This leaves a significant gap in care for people being worked up with suspected lung cancer, who face high levels of clinical complexity, uncertainty, and emotional distress.

The implementation of the Specialist Lung Cancer Nurses program in Queensland and South Australia in late 2023 has achieved strong success, supporting over 3,500 new patients with suspected or confirmed lung cancer through more than 13,100 clinical interactions to date. An independent analysis of the QLD and SA program found substantial health system return on investment and Quality of Life gained. These nurses have embedded within their local lung cancer multidisciplinary teams and have introduced a range of nurse-led initiatives that streamline the lung cancer care pathway. Notably, they have established peri-diagnosis clinics, which have improved the timeliness of access to supportive care, diagnosis, and treatment.

Specialist Lung Cancer Nurses are essential to ensuring the success of the National Lung Cancer Screening Program and improving lung cancer outcomes more broadly. Investment in this workforce, and in the Lung Foundation Australia Model of Care, will ensure people with suspected lung cancer receive the support they need.



“Having been through two different cancer diagnoses, I have experienced many contrasts in my journey. For example, when I had breast cancer, I had ready access to breast cancer nurses, while as a lung cancer patient, I’m yet to meet one in the course of the four years of my treatment.”

* (cost saving and Quality of Life gained - based on an independent analysis of Lung Foundation Australia's Specialist Lung Cancer Nurse Model of Care. Full details available on request.

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

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, such as cigarette smoke, 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 Victoria¹⁴⁻¹⁷

- **Deaths:** 1,670 in 2023
- **Prevalence:** 137,700 Victorians in 2022
- **Health system expenditure:** \$438 million in 2022-23
- **Potentially preventable hospitalisations:** fourth leading cause
- Among chronic conditions in 2023-24 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 there is no cure for COPD, early diagnosis and evidence-based interventions can slow the progression of the disease, allow people to live well, and can **reduce exacerbations that lead to preventable hospitalisations**. 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.

To reduce pressure on the Victorian healthcare system, Lung Foundation Australia are seeking investment of \$650,000 per year, for four years, to help fund our clinician-led Respiratory Care Program.

Lung Foundation Australia's Respiratory Care Program

Lung Foundation Australia's cost-effective Respiratory Care Program supports people across Victoria living with a respiratory disease to better manage their condition and avoid unnecessary hospital admissions. The program comprises three clinician-led telephone appointments conducted over four to six months, plus a follow-up call 12 months after the final session.

Benefits of Lung Foundation Australia's Respiratory Care Program

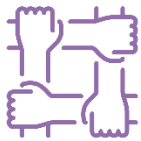


Free to consumers
Evidence-based and **cost-effective**



Provides **equitable** access via a telehealth model

Reduces hospitalisations and emergency department presentations*



Since 2019, 307 Victorians living with COPD have been clients of our Program

99% of participants were satisfied with the program



Participants were more likely to use a range of evidence-based strategies to manage their lung condition.

“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.”



*The proportion of people who reported zero ED presentations in the last 12 months increased from 61% at session 1 to 77% 12 months after completing the program. The proportion of people who reported zero ED presentations in the last 12 months increased from 67% at session 1 to 80% 12 months after completing the program.

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

Air pollution, intensified by climate change, poses a growing threat to public health in Australia. The burning of fossil fuels and rising temperatures increase harmful pollutants and allergens, while more frequent extreme weather events contribute to smoke and mould in the air¹⁸⁻²⁰. There is no safe level of air pollution - even low exposure can severely impact lung health and raise the risk of illness and death²¹. As climate change drives hotter, drier conditions and more natural disasters, the dangers of poor air quality will continue to escalate.

The main contributors to pollution in Victoria are motor vehicles, smoke from bushfires and planned burning, smoke from wood heaters, and industry.



Air pollution was the 2nd leading risk factor for death globally in 2021²⁵

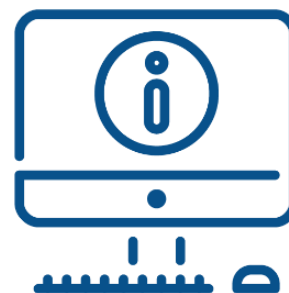


Victoria is experiencing a marked increase in climate-related events, including more frequent heatwaves, bushfires, and droughts²². These events are worsening air quality and compounding health risks, particularly for people with lung conditions. Insights from Lung Foundation Australia's 2023 survey show that 59% of respondents living with lung disease required medication due to poor air quality, and many reported being confined indoors, unable to work, and experiencing heightened anxiety²³. Victorians expressed a strong need for tailored guidance and resources to manage symptoms during high pollution events.

With growing concerns among Australians – both those living with a lung disease²³ and those without²⁴ - about poor air quality and a lack of community guidance, the need to build climate resilience has never been more urgent. Strengthening the public's ability to manage climate risks can be achieved by developing evidence-based, accessible information available that is available before, during, and after climate emergencies.

For the one in three Australians living with lung disease, tailored resources are needed to provide clear guidance on developing an action plan, protecting themselves, reducing exposure, and knowing when to seek medical assistance.

As the leading peak body in lung health, Lung Foundation Australia are best placed to develop and disseminate resources to people with lung disease. We also have a strong track record of producing accurate, high quality, and co-designed resources for populations without an existing lung disease.



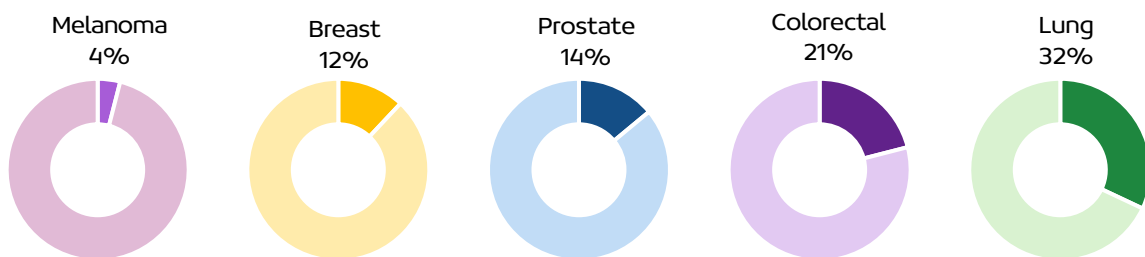
To build the climate resilience of Victorians and safeguard future generations from the impacts of climate change, Lung Foundation Australia are seeking a one-off investment of \$350,000 for the development of high-quality community resources.

Priority 4

\$180,000 per year, for 2 years, to fund a Lung Cancer Screening Priority Populations Engagement Officer based in Victoria

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer-related death in Victoria⁴. Many lung cancer patients experience critical delays in diagnosis and commencement of treatment which can reduce survival rate²⁶. Despite being the fifth most diagnosed cancer in Australia, it continues to have one of the lowest survival rates².

Mortality rate for the 5 most common cancers in Victoria²



When lung cancer is detected early, survival rate and quality of life are dramatically improved. The National Lung Cancer Screening Program (NLCSP), which was launched in July 2025, provides an opportunity for early detection and early intervention for people with lung cancer. This program is predicted to **save more than 12,000 Australian lives** over the next decade by diagnosing cancers at an earlier stage²⁷. Over 72,900 Victorians are expected to be eligible for lung cancer screening in the first year of the program. However, there are many **barriers to accessing screening** that will mean the most disadvantaged in the community will not get access to this life saving program.

Lung Foundation Australia has played a central role in shaping and supporting the NLCSP, with a strong focus on equity and inclusion. Through national consultation with stakeholders and individuals from priority populations, we have identified key barriers and enablers to accessing screening. Barriers included, but were not limited to:

- Reluctancy to disclose smoking history due to stigma
- Stigma surrounding lung cancer and smoking cessation support
- Lack of culturally safe services
- Language barriers and a lack of in-language materials
- Limited awareness of screening programs in priority population communities.

All five priority populations we consulted with emphasised the critical role of local tailored support to assist with NLCSP engagement.



These insights underscore the need for targeted support. The proposed Engagement Officer will work directly with communities, service providers and professional organisations to address these barriers, build trust, and ensure the program reaches those most at risk.

This dedicated role is essential to **advancing equitable access** to the National Lung Cancer Screening Program for priority populations, including people living in rural and remote areas, people with disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people in the LGBTIQ+ community, and people living with mental illness.

To support equitable access to screening, Lung Foundation Australia are seeking a one seeking investment of \$180,000 per year, for two years, to fund a Lung Cancer Screening Priority Populations Engagement Officer based in Victoria.

Priority 5

\$350,000 to help fund the development of e-cigarette resources for young adults to empower them to make healthy decisions

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 between 2021-2023 alone. More than half of these Victorians were under 25 years old²⁸.

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 not²⁹. We are witnessing a new generation of young people inhaling harmful chemicals, addicted to nicotine, and needing support.

Young people need access to age-appropriate information and resources that not only support prevention but also provide effective, appropriate approaches to quitting vaping.

To empower and support young Victorians to not vape, Lung Foundation Australia are seeking a one-off investment of \$350,000 for the development of high-quality resources.

Lung Foundation Australia are experienced in delivering high quality and culturally appropriate resources

Lung Foundation Australia has a strong track record of producing accurate, high quality, and co-designed resources on e-cigarettes, and have extensive experience in co-designing culturally and linguistically diverse resources.

Our 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, which includes information and support to [young people](#), their [parents and carers](#), and [educators](#), our more recent resources include our:

- co-designed [animated short videos, and factsheet](#) for First Nations young people in collaboration with Na Joomelah and the National Best Practice Unit Tackling Indigenous Smoking team. The evaluation of this project has shown incredibly positive outcomes.
- factsheets on the [environmental impacts of e-cigarettes](#), and [vaping and mental health](#).
- resources for First Nations young people aged 18-24 including an [animated video, poster and three fact sheets](#) which was done in collaboration with Apunipima Cape York Health Council to create
- "Ditch the Vape" [resources](#) for young tradies aged 18-24 working predominantly in the construction industry including videos, infographics and posters.



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