

## MEDIA RELEASE

31 August 2021

### Air Nutrition on the table this Asthma Week

**CANBERRA:** People are being encouraged to learn about *Air Nutrition* this [Asthma Week](#) (1-7 September) under a new campaign launched by Asthma Australia and peak health and climate bodies.

“*Air Nutrition* – you are what you breathe” encourages us all to think differently about what we are breathing in and the simple steps we can take to reduce our intake of air pollution for better health.

Recent studies investigating the impact of air pollution on health indicate there is no “safe” level of long-term exposure to particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) or nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), pollutants commonly found in sources like woodfire smoke and vehicle emissions.

Asthma Australia Medical Advisor and Respiratory Physician Dr John Blakey said if you care about what you drink, you should care about what you breathe.

“Australians know where to get decent coffee, or a good wine. They spend almost a billion dollars a year on bottled water,” Dr Blakey said.

“Many people are choosy about the thousand litres they’ll drink each year, but probably don’t pay much attention to the millions of litres of air they’ll breathe. If there were chemicals in tap water that caused disease, they would want to know about it.

“In contrast, we know that the chemicals and particulates in the air can cause asthma, infections, and cancer. We need to do more about that.”

This year alone, some communities across Canberra and surrounds have experienced high levels of air pollution (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) and may be unaware of the health risk.

This year, the suburb of Florey recorded the highest peak pollution event in the ACT, reaching PM<sub>2.5</sub> levels of 30 ug/m<sup>3</sup> rating as ‘FAIR’ – just higher than the ‘GOOD’ rating of 25ug/m<sup>3</sup>.

Although this was one of the better hourly peaks compared to other states across Australia, there is still room for improvement and more education on how to reduce exposure to air pollution.

“This data is in stark contrast to the year before where Canberrans lived through the worst air quality in the world during the bushfires. We can’t be complacent,” said Asthma Australia CEO Michele Goldman.

While COVID-19 restrictions have seen [reports of reductions](#) in some sources of air pollution, levels of woodfire heater smoke, hazard reduction smoke, dust and industry emissions have continued to tip the scale in normally 'clean' areas.

For many of the 2.7 million Australians living with asthma, peaks in air pollution like this can lead to an increase in asthma symptoms –like cough and wheeze – and an increase in hospitalisations.

For the general population, exposure to air pollution has been linked to lower life expectancy, risk of premature death, and increased burden of disease.

Ms Goldman encouraged people to start thinking about their *Air Nutrition* as a key part of a healthy life, especially for those with health conditions like asthma.

“This Asthma Week, we hope for everyone to start caring as much about the air they breathe as the food they eat, for their short and long-term health,” she said.

“You can start small, like avoid busy roads when exercising or use an extractor fan when cooking with gas to learning how to stay safe when air quality is poor. These measures can go a long way in improving your *Air Nutrition*.

“When you consistently breathe in pollutants it causes irritation and tissue damage in your lungs and even other parts of our body. Many people with asthma are sensitive to this and know when pollution is in the air, whereas people who don't get symptoms may have no idea of the potential of its long-term impacts.”

Those most at risk from air pollution include people with asthma, respiratory and heart conditions, pregnant women, the elderly and young children.

Australian National University Professor of Global Environmental Health Sotiris Vardoulakis said breathing clean air was as important for our health as eating nutritious food or drinking clean water.

“We wouldn't give our children dirty water to drink, similarly we shouldn't expose them to polluted air,” Prof. Vardoulakis said.

“Air pollution disproportionately affects people with asthma, but it also affects everybody in the community. We can all help reduce air pollution, and improve our health, by getting rid of our wood heaters or old cars and switching to clean energy.”

Asthma Week is being proudly supported by parliamentarian and paediatrician Dr Mike Freeland MP, Co-Chair of the Federal Parliament's Parliamentary Friends of Asthma.

“With one in nine Australians affected by asthma, it is critical to raise awareness of the symptoms and implications for this condition,” Dr Freeland said.

“Air pollution is a growing concern among the health community. As a paediatrician, over the years I have seen countless patients who suffer with asthma – and I have also seen the benefits of an appropriately managed Asthma Action Plan.”

Fellow parliamentarian and Federal Parliament's Parliamentary Friends of Asthma Co-Chair Mr Tony Pasin MP is also backing the campaign.

"Around 2.7 million Australians live with asthma with many of them suffering from severe symptoms, and as someone who has suffered with severe asthma most of my adult life, I understand how debilitating the condition can be," Mr Pasin said.

"We may consider ourselves to have clean and healthy air, but this is not always the case. Consistent exposure can lead to the development of serious long term health conditions like asthma, heart and lung disease, stroke, and cancer. That's why reducing daily exposure can have immediate and lifelong benefits for all of us. Raising awareness of respiratory diseases like asthma and the need for cautious practices and prevention measures is vital, especially at this challenging time."

For more information on Asthma Week and *Air Nutrition*, please visit [www.asthmaweek.org.au](http://www.asthmaweek.org.au).

## **Asthma Week 2021 is proudly presented by the Asthma Week Collaborative**

Asthma Australia

Lung Foundation Australia

Asthma Foundation Northern Territory

National Asthma Council

Asthma Foundation Western Australia

Pharmacy Guild of Australia

Centre for Air Pollution, Energy and Health Research

Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand

Centre of Excellence - Treatable Traits

University of Tasmania (Menzies)

Climate Council

Woolcock Institute of Medical Research

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### **About Asthma Australia**

Asthma Australia is a for-purpose, consumer organisation with a history of improving the lives of people with asthma. We operate across New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory to deliver evidence-based prevention and health strategies to more than half a million people each year. Asthma Australia works in partnership with the Asthma Foundations of Western Australia and the Northern Territory. We work with people with

# AIR NUTRITION

ASTHMA WEEK  
1-7 SEPTEMBER  
 ASTHMA  
AUSTRALIA

asthma, their family and friends, health professionals, researchers and governments. We find the best treatments and practices to make sure life with asthma is the best it can be.