Asthma Australia Victorian Pre-Budget Submission 2024-25

October 2023

Budget Proposals

The Asthma Australia submission focuses on the following funding proposals for consideration by the Victorian Government in the 2024-25 Budget:

Proposal	Investment
1. Program funding for asthma management in Victoria	Fund Asthma Australia $3,288,000 over four years to deliver services to and improve the lives of people with asthma in Victoria
2. Contribute to the national AirSmart public education campaign to reduce the health impacts of air pollution	The Victorian Government contribute: Option 1 $2,827,600 (metro and regional) and option 2 $611,760 (regional Victoria exclusively) for one year to fund the Victorian component of Asthma Australia's national AirSmart public education campaign to reduce the impacts of poor air quality
3. Increasing access to local air quality information	Expand the low-cost air quality sensor network in Victoria as a step towards ensuring all Victorian communities have access to local air quality information.
4. The Victorian Government's *Gas Substitution Roadmap* include phasing out wood heaters	Include wood heaters in the Victorian Energy Upgrades program and reinstate incentives for people to replace their wood heaters. This should have a limited impact on the Victorian Budget due to a scheme already existing for energy upgrades.

About Asthma Australia

Asthma Australia is a for-purpose, consumer organisation which has been improving the lives of people with asthma since 1962.

Asthma is an inflammatory condition of the airways, which restricts airflow and can be fatal. There is no cure, but most people with asthma can experience good control of their condition. Asthma affects 1 in 9 people in Australia, or 2.7 million people. It has various degrees of severity (mild to severe) and affects people of all ages, from childhood to adulthood. Asthma can appear at all ages and stages of life.

Asthma Australia's purpose is to help people breathe better so they can live freely. We deliver evidence-based prevention and health strategies to more than half a million people each year. To ensure people can access effective treatments and best practice healthcare for their asthma, we work directly with people with asthma, their family and friends, health professionals, researchers, schools and governments. This way, we can ensure people with asthma are supported with education and access to high-quality information and care where they live, work and play in all stages of life.

Asthma in Victoria

Impact on the health system and the community

Asthma is a chronic respiratory condition affecting 11.4% of Victorians, or more than 714,000 people.[i] Asthma prevalence is higher in regional Victoria (14.2%) compared with the Greater Melbourne Region (11.2%). Areas with the highest asthma prevalence in Victoria include Barwon-West (15.9%), Bendigo (15.3%) and the Latrobe Valley (15.2%).[ii]

Asthma places a significant burden on Victorian hospitals. There were 11,628 hospital admissions for asthma in Victoria in 2016-17, of which 5,668 were for people under the age of 19 years.[iii] In 2021-22, there were 5,730 potentially preventable hospitalisations in Victoria.[iv] In 2015-16, the average cost per potentially preventable hospitalisation for asthma is $2,860.[v] [vi]

Asthma was the diagnosis on admission to Victorian Emergency Departments for 22,970 people in 2016–17.[vii] Each Emergency Department presentation for asthma costs $443 on average.[viii] and repeated asthma-related presentation to Emergency Department is associated with an increased risk of hospitalisation.[ix]

Asthma prevalence in Australia is increasing. In 2022 Asthma was the 8th leading contributor to the overall burden of disease in Australia, having risen from 9th place in 2018 and 10th place in 2011. Asthma can both be caused and exacerbated by conditions related to the warming climate, which means asthma outcomes will worsen as climate change impacts increase. Asthma is the leading cause of burden of disease for people aged 5–14 years.[x]

The home environment

The home environment is particularly important for people with asthma and allergies, who are sensitive to substances we all breathe. These substances are referred to as 'triggers' because they can trigger asthma or allergy symptoms. Indoor air pollution from heating with gas or wood heaters and using gas cooktops produces a range of pollutants and can worsen indoor air quality, and exposure to mould and dampness can lead to a range of health problems. Exposure to these triggers can cause asthma flare-ups and contribute to the development of asthma.[xi]

A nationally representative survey of 5,041 people by Asthma Australia in 2022 found that homes are not healthy places for all Australians, particularly for people with asthma or allergies. One quarter of Australians (24%) are not happy or are unsure about the air quality inside their homes. Among people with asthma and allergies, three in ten reported that their symptoms are worse after spending time in the home.[xii]

Changing weather patterns due to climate change have reinforced the importance of housing in providing protection from cold, heat and other extreme weather events.[xiii] Governments across Australia in regions that have experienced torrential rain and floods have recognised the impact of this on people's homes, including the increased risk of mould in homes. No amount of mould is considered safe for health[xiv] and people with asthma, allergies and other breathing conditions are more at risk from contact with mould.[xv]

Housing is a key social determinant of health and particularly important for people with asthma as housing conditions influence an individual's asthma symptom control and risk of developing asthma. The type of energy used in homes contributes to the health of the indoor environment. Harmful energy sources include gas and wood, both of which emit harmful pollutants that can trigger asthma symptoms and its development as well as cause other serious health conditions.

The Victorian Healthy Homes Program delivered thermal comfort and energy efficiency upgrades to 1,000 homes of low-income Victorians with a health or social care need. It was designed as a randomised controlled trial, with households randomised to either the intervention (upgraded before winter) or control (upgraded after winter) group. The purpose of the trial was to evaluate the difference between groups over winter in thermal comfort, energy use, healthcare utilisation, health, and quality of life.

It was found that even a minor thermal comfort and energy efficiency upgrade had multiple benefits over winter: higher indoor temperatures, less gas use, lower energy bills, reduced emissions, improved quality of life, and less healthcare utilisation.[xvi] Health benefits of the upgrade indicated cost savings, including reduced breathlessness, with $887 per person saved in the healthcare system over the winter period. Cost-benefit analysis showed the upgrade would save costs within 3 years due to savings in both energy and health. Savings were heavily weighted towards healthcare with every $1 saved in energy, more than $10 is saved in health.[xvii]

Initiatives that improve the efficiency of people's homes and their health due to the type of energy sources they use, particularly for people without the means to make the changes themselves, are the types of investments Victoria needs. These investments not only result in improved health outcomes for Victorians, they deliver cost savings to the health system and contribute to the Victorian Government's emission reduction targets.

Asthma, climate change and air quality

Climate change is increasing the frequency, duration and severity of many hazards associated with asthma development and symptoms. With asthma affecting 1 in 9 Australians, or 2.7 million people, people with asthma are one of the largest population groups vulnerable to climate change hazards.

Climate change is inextricably linked with air quality. The emissions which contribute to climate change also reduce air quality, which can cause people to develop asthma and trigger symptoms or exacerbations in people with asthma. These adverse impacts on asthma are also caused by a number of threats which are increasing as a result of climate change, including bushfire smoke, ground level ozone and pollen. Reducing emissions will therefore improve air quality in the short and long term.

Many people with asthma recognise they are particularly impacted by the effects of climate change. Asthma Australia surveyed 12,000 people during the catastrophic 2019–20 bushfires about the impacts they experienced as a result of exposure to bushfire smoke.[xviii] When asked what the government, Asthma Australia or other organisations could do to reduce the impact of poor air quality on their day-to-day life, more than 1,000 respondents provided open text responses that linked the bushfire smoke crisis with climate change. Common suggestions included taking action to mitigate climate change and supporting individuals and communities to respond to bushfire smoke, for example by providing people with air purifiers and implementing building improvement programs to prevent smoke from entering homes, commercial buildings and schools.

In 2023, Asthma Australia undertook a nationally representative survey involving 2,000 respondents to understand what priorities people in Australia want the Federal Government to address in the National Health and Climate Strategy.[xix] Two-thirds of respondents lived with asthma or another chronic health condition. Some of the key results were:

- 70 per cent of people think governments should act to protect people whose health is vulnerable to climate change.
- Of the respondents with asthma:
    - 91 per cent were worried about the impacts of climate change;
    - 71 per cent were concerned about increased air pollution as a climate change impact; and
    - 69 per cent were concerned about more frequent and severe natural disasters.

One quarter of the people surveyed said climate change had already impacted their health. Among those people, breathing issues were the most common impact (49%) followed by poor mental health (39%) and hay fever (39%).

Victorian Budget Priority Areas

The importance of respiratory health has been highlighted through various issues across Victoria including the 2016 thunderstorm asthma event, the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2019–20 bushfire smoke crisis. The Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) declared in September that El Niño and a positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) are underway, which means warmer and drier conditions will be more likely over spring and summer. A positive IOD contributes to greater bushfire risk over southeast Australia in spring, while El Niño contributes to elevated bushfire risk over both spring and summer.[xx] The likelihood of conditions that will impact people's health, particularly from bushfire smoke, means that investing in measures that improve the safety of people's homes and gives them access to reliable information, will not only assist but save lives.

In addition to the declaration of an El Niño by the BOM, the Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC) released their Seasonal Bushfire Outlook for Spring 2023 which identified that Australia's climate influences have shifted significantly since last spring, contributing to an increased risk of bushfires in parts of Australia, including regions in Victoria. There is a higher than normal potential for forests to carry fire in the Gippsland area, and a high likelihood that the bushfire season of 2023-24 will commence earlier across much of central, western and northern Victoria.[xxi]

It is vital to address asthma risk factors and give people the tools they need to make lasting changes to live healthy lives. It is particularly important to ensure people with asthma on low incomes receive the support they need to live in healthy home environments.

A focus for Asthma Australia is on addressing air pollution given the significant impacts poor air quality has on exacerbating and developing asthma. Air pollution is second only to tobacco use as a cause of death from non-communicable diseases globally, and the United Nations recognises air pollution as one of five risk factors for noncommunicable diseases, alongside unhealthy diet, tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol and physical inactivity.[xxii] Exposure to environmental hazards (such as poor air quality, bushfires and thunderstorms) is both a risk factor for the development of asthma and a trigger for asthma symptoms in people who have asthma.[xxiii]

People should be empowered and provided with information to make informed choices about their health when it comes to air quality. This is so they engage in their daily activities understanding and knowing what the air quality conditions are, no matter where in Australia they live. Asthma Australia provides a range of service to people living with asthma in Victoria but currently receives no Victorian Government funding towards these services.

As climate change progresses and extreme weather events increasingly drive people to seek refuge in their homes, housing conditions and the absence or removal of internal health triggers become ever more important. With the harms of gas energy becoming increasingly well known, it is important that people are guided away from replacing gas heaters with wood heaters, which risks increasing pollution and damaging health. Homes utilising efficient and cleaner forms of energy can help improve both indoor and outdoor air quality and contribute to climate change mitigation. Electrification provides higher energy efficiency and reduced consumer costs than either gas or wood.[xxiv]

Asthma Australia's Budget proposals link directly to the strategic objectives identified in Victoria's Air Quality Strategy *Clean Air for All Victorians*[xxv], in particular helping vulnerable Victorians and supporting the broader community; and raising the bar on air quality information. Asthma Australia's AirSmart public education campaign and proposal on air quality monitoring focus on empowering the community to access information about air quality to understand how it impacts their health, while also recognising we must improve the availability of air quality information.

Asthma Australia recognises the intersecting issue of budget constraints for the Victorian Government with the state budget, along with cost-of-living pressures impacting the community. The 2024-25 Budget proposals we have identified work to deliver savings for the health system, by addressing ways in which we can improve asthma management and the environment in which people live. This means Victorians living with asthma can avoid unnecessary hospital visits, stay healthy and have contributing lives.

Proposal 1: Program funding for asthma management in Victoria

Asthma Australia does not receive any ongoing funding from the Victorian Government and relies on Federal funding, donations, bequests and philanthropy to provide services in Victoria which enables us to deliver a basic level of service. Additional funding support would enable greater reach, deeper engagement, and a more profound and enduring impact upon the health and wellbeing of people with asthma in Victoria. In short, Victorians are missing out.

With additional funding Victorians would be provided with a more personalised services, tailored to the Victorian ecosystem. Improved asthma management reduces the cost burden to the health care system, reduces preventable hospital admissions and improves quality of life. The cost for delivering these services is $822,000 per annum and $3,288,000 over four years.

Victoria has the capacity to save millions by addressing the rates of potentially preventable hospitalisations through providing education to empower and support people with asthma to self-manage, by investing in community-based work, and by providing tools to minimise exposure to common and harmful triggers. The investment Asthma Australia is seeking is considerably less than the potential return on investment in keeping people out of hospital.

Support effective self-management practices

Twenty-Eight per cent of callers to our 1800 phone line service are from Victoria. This phone line is supported by asthma educators who deliver person-centred, evidence-based self-management information and support. We are now developing our support services further using a Customer Experience model. This will include developing a more sophisticated multi-channel customised approach utilising telephone, videochat, email, newsletters, SMS and webchat—to encourage a deeper ongoing engagement with people with asthma and their carers, leading to an we believe, an improvement in their quality of life.

Supporting Children with Asthma in Schools

Our Schools and Young Peoples Program is active in raising the awareness of asthma as a major health condition impacting young people. As part of this program, we have had contact with over 900 schools in Victoria (40% of the national total), focusing on asthma first aid, resources and Guidelines for supporting school children with asthma. Over 15,000 teachers (49% of the national total) have been trained in Victoria. We have engaged with school children to understand the impact of asthma, self-management, symptom control and trigger management. The next phase involves co designing tailored responses with children, educators and parents. This is an activity that with support, could be initiated in Victorian schools using the extensive networks we have already established as well as capitalising on a program that is well known and trusted by the Victorian school sector.

Develop the health professional workforce

Asthma Australia has invested significantly in the development of health care professionals through various means including our partnership with Reed Medical Education to develop and launch the 'Advanced Learning Module *Asthma in Australia: Practical Solutions for challenges in primary care'*. This online accredited training is free of charge for health professionals including General Practitioners, nurses, pharmacists and allied health professionals. We seek support to not only continue this service, but to expand on it and increase its uptake. We seek to work with existing organisations, systems and processes to build a more integrated and connected asthma pathway for people with asthma and their treating healthcare professionals. This includes the better utilisation of evidence-based guidelines, promotion of new practices, engaging and supporting health care professionals around changes to scope

of practice and identifying and understanding the patient asthma journey and their pain points associated with interactions with health care services. Supporting this approach is the ongoing development and distribution of resources and asthma updates to health professionals in Victoria via digital and hard copy platforms.

Create supportive community environments

Asthma Australia has conducted several projects across Australia that have worked directly with community in developing community-based solutions. Projects in South Australia in particular, have been successful in developing models of care that have created systems change and lasting influence. We are seeking to do this type of work in Victoria, in particular with rural and remote communities, through the development of social intervention models aimed at influencing the wider determinants of health around the person with asthma. The concept of developing an Asthma Smart Community - a wrap-around support model based on a deep understanding from people with asthma regarding what impacts them and their asthma management and then using a person centred, consumer participation and empowerment approach in developing local solutions, is gaining momentum in South Australia. There are three areas in rural Victoria where the incidence of asthma is higher than the state average; Barwon-West (15.9%), Bendigo (15.3%) and the Latrobe Valley (15.2%).[xxvi]

INVESTMENT REQUESTED: The Victorian Government fund Asthma Australia $3,288,000 over four years to deliver services to and improve the lives of people with asthma in Victoria.

Table 1: Request for program funding

Program	Funding request
Support Effective Self-Management Practices	$265,000
Supporting Children with asthma in schools	$80,000
Developing the Health Professional workforce	$90,000
Create supportive rural community environments	$250,000
Subtotal	$685,000
Oncosts and administration	$137,000
TOTAL per annum	$822,000
TOTAL over four years	$3,288,000

Proposal 2: Contribute to the national AirSmart public education campaign to reduce the health impacts of air pollution

There is a gap in Australian public health messaging around the impacts of air pollution which disproportionately affect the health and wellbeing of people with asthma (2.7 million Australians). Asthma Australia has taken the lead on developing and piloting a public education campaign and air quality app called 'AirSmart'.

AirSmart fills the need for community education and guidance around air quality which was revealed by the 2019–2020 bushfire smoke crisis. This need was recognised by the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements. The need for access to air quality information and guidance will only increase as climate change continues to increase the frequency and severity of events causing poor air quality.

As noted above, the BOM declared an El Niño and a positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) are underway, leading to an elevated fire risk over both spring and summer.[xxvii] The AFAC Seasonal Bushfire Outlook for Spring 2023 also identified an increased risk of bushfires in the Gippsland area, and a high likelihood that the bushfire season will commence earlier across much of central, western and northern Victoria.[xxviii] This all points to the urgent need for the community to have access to information on air quality.

AirSmart was developed with the guidance of a panel of environmental and public health experts, and piloted in communities across southern NSW, ACT, and regional Victoria over a six-week period in July and August 2022. The pilot was evaluated and showed strong indications that Australians want access to local, responsive air quality information and tools. Engagement in the campaign, as shown by over 16,000 app downloads and 23,000 website views in just six weeks, suggests that air quality is an important issue for many Australians.

AirSmart includes an air quality public health campaign which raises awareness about air quality and promotes the AirSmart app as a source of air quality information:

- **The public health campaign** aims to raise community awareness about poor air quality, and how to interpret health advice, so people can protect themselves against exposure to air pollution and the associated health impacts. This evidence-based educational initiative is an Australian-first, using a mix of traditional and digital media channels to reach the full community. The creative process behind the AirSmart campaign included consumer research and was guided by environmental, public health and social marketing experts.
- **The AirSmart app** is a consumer tool for accessing local, real-time air quality information and related health advice. Asthma Australia used human-centred design principles to design the AirSmart app. The AirSmart app provides consumers with localised 'real-time' air quality, and strategies to avoid or minimise poor air quality exposure. The app also provides personalised notifications and health advice at specific air quality levels to provide consumers with specific daily advice about the most effective protection.

Asthma Australia is providing two proposed options for funding. Option 1 is to roll-out across all of Victoria including a 10-week advertising campaign in November and December, peak bushfire season; and option 2 is to roll-out in regional Victoria exclusively in bushfire prone areas also including a 10-week advertising campaign in November and December.

INVESTMENT REQUESTED: The Victorian Government contribute: Option 1 $2,827,600 (Metro and regional) and option 2 $611,760 (regional Victoria exclusively) for one year to fund the Victorian component of Asthma Australia's national AirSmart public education campaign to reduce the impacts of poor air quality.

Table 1: Victorian Government requested contribution to AirSmart – Metro and regional Victoria

Item	Cost
10-week media campaign commencing Nov/Dec	$2,700,000
Project management	$57,800
App maintenance and updates	$39,800
Evaluation	$30,000
TOTAL	**$2,827,600**

Cost for year 2 $2,968,980

Table 2: Victorian Government requested contribution to AirSmart – Focused on regional Victoria

Item	Cost
10-week media campaign commencing Nov/Dec	$505,000
Project management	$46,960
App maintenance and updates	$39,800
Evaluation	$20,000
TOTAL	**$611,760**

Cost for year 2 $642,300

Proposal 3: Increasing access to local air quality information

A key finding from the Federal Government's 2021 State of the Environment report was that better information could reduce the impact of poor air quality.[xxix] The report recognised that communities need real-time, local air quality information during periods of poor air quality.

However, many communities around Australia do not have access to local air quality information because there are not enough air quality monitoring stations. Regional and rural populations commonly lack local air quality monitoring facilities, which can be particularly problematic during bushfires if people in these communities are disproportionately affected by smoke from nearby fires. However, even in metropolitan areas, air quality monitoring stations span many suburbs, meaning localised peaks of air pollution are neither detected nor reported on.

Air quality monitoring stations provide highly accurate information, however, they require suitable locations and can be expensive to establish and run. In contrast, low-cost air quality sensors provide air quality data at a good level of accuracy. Additionally, there is more flexibility in placement as the sensors can be affixed to premises such as schools or council buildings. Some sensors require a data connection while others have built in communications.

The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Victoria have recognised the role of low-cost air quality sensors in their network by investing in different types of air quality monitors to provide information on the concentration of pollutants in the air. Sensor monitoring sites and portable air monitors are located across Victoria.

Having already established a process to supplement air quality monitoring information using low-cost sensors, Victoria can lead the way and expand on this network to ensure all communities have access to local air quality information. Investing further in this type of technology, which is low cost but has a significant impact, is an investment that will deliver a return for the Victorian Budget.

As noted in other parts of this submission, the need for access to air quality information and guidance will only increase as climate change continues to increase the frequency and severity of events causing poor air quality. The declaration of an El Niño in September 2023 and increased risk of bushfires means there is a greater risk to people's health.

Under the National Clean Air Agreement states and territories having prime responsibility for monitoring and managing air quality, and all governments are required to help maintain and improve air quality. One of four strategic approaches in the National Clean Air Agreement is the following:

> Better knowledge, education and awareness are essential requirements to inform policy decisions and to help empower communities and individuals to better deal with air pollution. Knowledge, improved through information sharing and research, is critical to plug existing data gaps, identify future trends and help focus efforts in managing air quality, and explore innovative measures to address air pollution. The Agreement's initial work plan also includes a two-year plan for reforms to improve the National Pollutant Inventory. [xxx]

Investing in increasing access to local air quality information acts on the recommendations of the State of the Environment Report and progresses the National Clean Air Agreement work plan. This information is critical to ensure that people vulnerable to the health impact of air pollution exposure are able to protect themselves and their families.

INVESTMENT REQUESTED: Expand the low-cost air quality sensor network in Victoria as a step towards ensuring all Victorian communities have access to air quality information.

Proposal 4: The Victorian Government's *Gas Substitution Roadmap* include phasing out wood heaters

Australian homes should be safe, healthy places, free from harmful substances – regardless of who owns them. This means they should be free from wood- and gas-fuelled appliances and powered by efficient and renewable electricity sources. The transition to renewably sourced electricity would not only improve indoor air quality in our homes and therefore better support human health, but also reduce carbon emissions and their detrimental impact on human health and the environment. Asthma Australia strongly supports moves towards energy sources which are efficient and don't harm people's health, along with support to maximise home health and energy efficiency and enable low-income households to transition to healthier homes.

Asthma Australia congratulates the Victorian Government on the landmark *Gas Substitution Roadmap* with new homes, including apartments, requiring a planning permit required to be all-electric from 1 January 2024. This means new homes and residential subdivisions that require a planning permit cannot connect to the gas network. All new government buildings will also be all-electric, including new schools and hospitals. This is a significant step towards reducing the harmful health impacts of household gas appliances on families, as well as a critical move in reducing carbon emissions.

This announcement will mean people who move into new homes will have a healthier environment, less risk of asthma, lower greenhouse gas emissions and lower energy bills. This is particularly significant as children are 1.3 times more likely to develop asthma in a home with a gas cooktop due to emissions. That is comparable to the risk of tobacco smoking in the home. Asthma Australia has been a firm advocate for the phasing out of gas usage in Australian homes due to its link with asthma. Gas cooktops increase nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter in the home and can cause new cases of asthma.

We propose that the same mechanism be introduced for wood heaters by requiring any new housing developments or individual houses in Victoria be wood heater free.

Pollution from wood heaters contains harmful pollutants including fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) and known carcinogens. There is no 'safe' level of air pollution and detrimental health effects can occur even at low levels of pollution, well below air pollution standards.[xxxi] Wood heater smoke is a serious risk factor for asthma, both in terms of developing asthma and triggering symptoms in people who already have asthma.[xxxii] It is also a risk factor for other respiratory diseases, certain cancers, cardiovascular disease, neurological disease, premature birth and premature death.[xxxiii] These health impacts result in substantial economic costs, which have been estimated at $3,800 per wood heater.[xxxiv]

In 2020, Asthma Australia commissioned a representative survey of 25,039 people, which found that people exposed to wood heater smoke are largely unable to protect themselves against its impacts.[xxxv] Further, the survey found the majority of people support regulation to reduce the impact of wood heaters, with stronger support among people with asthma.

A report by the Australian Capital Territory's (ACT) Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment on wood heater policy in the ACT found that wood heaters have the greatest impact on the ACT's air quality. The ACT Government recently announced plans to phase out wood heaters by 2045 as a key step in its 'pathway to electrification'.[xxxvi] While Asthma Australia believes the timeframe should be more ambitious, we welcomed this announcement and believe other state and territory governments should phase out wood heaters in residential areas. In addition, and as the ACT Government has acknowledged, this transition must ensure that low-income households are financially supported to replace wood heaters with efficient reverse cycle air conditioning systems.

Homes utilising efficient and cleaner forms of energy can help improve both indoor and outdoor air quality and contribute to climate change mitigation. Electrification provides higher energy efficiency and reduced consumer costs than either gas or wood.[xxxvii] As climate change progresses, and extreme weather events increasingly drive people to seek refuge in their homes, housing conditions and the absence or removal of internal health triggers become ever more important. Asthma Australia strongly supports a transition to residential electrification across Australia, and particularly one powered by renewable energy with adequate support for households on low incomes. With the harms of gas energy becoming increasingly well known, it is important that people are guided away from replacing gas heaters with wood heaters, which risks increasing pollution and damaging health. Residential electrification must include removing both gas and wood energy from our homes.

The Victorian Energy Upgrades program currently provides assistance to reduce power bills and greenhouse gas emissions, providing discounts to households to upgrade appliances and equipment for lighting, space heating and cooling, water heating, and draft sealing. Up until recent times, the Victorian Government also provided incentives for people to replace their wood heaters, however the scheme no longer is in operation and little information is available about the reasons behind it being ceased.

A stronger mechanism must be in place to move away from the installation of wood heaters, as per the approach with gas installations. Allowing new wood heaters to be installed hampers the effectiveness and intent of the *Gas Substitution Roadmap* and the move towards electrification by continuing to allow the installation of a polluting and inefficient method of heating. Decisive action is required to ensure the Victorian community is not being exposed to the ongoing impacts of pollution from wood heaters and that Victorian Government action on emissions is not undermined.

INVESTMENT REQUESTED: Include wood heaters in the Victorian Energy Upgrades program and reinstate incentives for people to replace their wood heaters. This should have a limited impact on the Victorian Budget due to a scheme already existing for energy upgrades.

[i] ABS 2018. *National Health Survey: First Results 2017-18*, ABS Cat no. 4364.0.55.001.
[ii] Public Health Information Development Unit (PHIDU), 2019. *Asthma Atlas of Australia*.
[iii] Public Health Information Development Unit (PHIDU), 2019. *Asthma Atlas of Australia*.
[iv]Public Health Information Development Unit (PHIDU) 2019, Asthma Atlas of Australia. Adelaide: PHIDU
[v] AIHW National Hospital Morbidity Database; AIHW Disease Expenditure Database.
[vi] The term PPH does not mean that a patient admitted for that condition did not need to be hospitalised at the time of admission. Rather the hospitalisation could have potentially been prevented through the provision of appropriate preventative health interventions and early disease management in primary care and community-based care settings (including by general practitioners, medical specialists, dentists, nurses and allied health professionals). PPH rates are indicators of the effectiveness of non-hospital care.
[vii] AIHW, 2017. *Emergency department care 2016–17: Australian hospital statistics*, Canberra: AIHW.
[viii] Independent Hospital Pricing Authority, 2013-14.
[ix] Giangioppo, S. et al., 2020. 'Emergency department visit count: a practical tool to predict asthma hospitalisation in children', *Journal of Asthma*, vol 57(10).
[x] AIHW, 2022. *Australian Burden of Disease Study 2022—Key Findings*. Web Report. Canberra: AIHW.
[xi] Asthma Australia (2022) Homes, Health and Asthma in Australia: Understanding who is at risk in their home, what actions people take to protect themselves, and the barriers to action.
[xii] Ibid
[xiii] World Health Organisation, 2018. WHO Housing and Health Guidelines. Geneva: World Health Organization. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.
[xiv] Asthma Australia, 2022. Homes, Health and Asthma in Australia, Understanding who is at risk of asthma or allergies in their home, what actions people take to protect themselves, and the barriers to action.
[xv] NSW Government, NSW Health, Mould fact sheet, https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/factsheets/Pages/mould.aspx (Accessed 13 January 2023).
[xvi] Sustainability Victoria, 2022. The Victorian Healthy Homes Program: Research findings.
[xvii] Ibid
[xviii] Asthma Australia. 2020. Bushfire Smoke Impact Survey.
[xix] A summary of the results from the Climate and Health Survey can be accessed at Asthma-Australia-Climate-and-Health-Survey-Key-Findings-August-2023.pdf
[xx] The Bureau declares El Niño and positive Indian Ocean Dipole events, Issued 19 September 2023, Accessed 25 September 2023 Media Releases - Bureau of Meteorology Newsroom (bom.gov.au)
[xxi] AFAC Seasonal Bushfire Outlook Spring 2023, Seasonal Bushfire Outlook Spring 2023 (afac.com.au), Accessed 3 October 2023.
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[xxv] The State of Victoria Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, 2022. Clean air for all Victorians, Victoria's Air Quality Strategy.
[xxvi] Public Health Information Development Unit (PHIDU), 2019. *Asthma Atlas of Australia*.
[xxvii] The Bureau declares El Nino and positive Indian Ocean Dipole events, Issued 19 September 2023, Accessed 25 September 2023 Media Releases - Bureau of Meteorology Newsroom (bom.gov.au)
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[xxix] Australia State of the Environment 2021, https://soe.dcceew.gov.au/?_gl=1*1s98wwo*_ga*NjY1NjU1NDYyLjE2Njc4NjgxMjQ.*_ga_1M2TBC9WWS*MTY2Nzg2ODEyMy4xLjEuMTY2Nzg2ODk1OC4wLjAuMA..&_ga=2.122277762.820626621.1667868124-665655462.1667868124 (Accessed 8 November 2022)
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