



Asthma Australia Tasmanian Pre-Budget Submission 2024-25

November 2023

Budget Proposals

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

Proposal	Investment
1. Increase funding for the Asthma Management Program in Tasmania	Increase funding for Asthma Australia to \$504,000 over three years to deliver services to and improve the lives of people with asthma in Tasmania
2. Funding for the Asthma Smart Community Model	Fund Asthma Australia \$708,000 over three years to initiate the Asthma Smart Community Model in North West Tasmania
3. Contribute to the national AirSmart public education campaign to reduce the health impacts of air pollution	The Tasmanian Government contribute: Option 1 \$545,760 or Option 2 \$381,760 for one year to fund the Tasmanian component of Asthma Australia's national AirSmart public education campaign to reduce the impacts of poor air quality

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 people¹. 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 Tasmania

Impact on the health system and the community

Asthma is one of the most common chronic diseases in Tasmania, affecting 66,000 Tasmanians, or more than one in eight people - the second highest prevalence of any state or territory in Australia.² Across local government areas in Tasmania, the Brighton municipality has the highest rates of asthma, and the Launceston municipality has the highest total number of people with asthma.³ Asthma caused 11 deaths in Tasmania in 2020.⁴

Asthma places a significant burden on Tasmanian hospitals. In 2016–17, 1,451 Tasmanians presented to emergency departments for asthma.⁵ In this same period, asthma was responsible for 196 hospitalisations per 100,000 people in Tasmania.⁶ In the period in 2020–21, there were 692 potentially preventable hospitalisations for asthma in Tasmania.⁷ The Epidemiology Unit in the Tasmanian Department of Health provided Asthma Australia with the following data on the prevalence of asthma in Tasmania from 2015 to 2019:

- Hospitalisations in public hospitals in Tasmania doubled from 586 in 2015 to 1,149 in 2018, then fell marginally to 1,083 in 2019.⁸
- Hospitalisations were spread evenly between the Royal Hobart Hospital and the Launceston General Hospital with 1,878 and 1,875 hospitalisations respectively. This was followed by the North West Regional Hospital (435) and the Mersey Community Hospital (209).⁹
- In 2019, readmission rates to the same hospital within one year following treatment were highest in the North West Regional Hospital at 23.5%, followed by the Royal Hobart Hospital at 20.6%;¹⁰ Launceston had the highest number of preventable hospitalisations in this period;¹¹ and
- The burden of asthma is greatest for children aged 5-9 and in Tasmania, and the highest number of children presenting to hospital is at the North West Regional Hospital.¹²

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.¹³ 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.¹⁴ Two-thirds of respondents lived with asthma or another chronic health condition. Some of the key results were:

- 70 percent of people think governments should act to protect people whose health is vulnerable to climate change.
- Of the respondents with asthma:
 - 91 percent were worried about the impacts of climate change;
 - 71 percent were concerned about increased air pollution as a climate change impact; and
 - 69 percent 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%).

Tasmanian Budget Priority Alignment

The Tasmanian Government has identified chronic conditions as one of the main challenges to the Tasmanian health system in its *Our Healthcare Future: Advancing Tasmania's Health* (Exposure Draft).

In bringing together our responses to the *Our Healthcare Future Immediate Actions and Consultation Paper*, the *Exposure Draft—Our Healthcare Future: Advancing Tasmania's Health*, the *Statewide Discharge Draft Framework Consultation*, the *Long-Term Plan for Healthcare 2040* and to the *Issues Paper—Establishing a Statewide Clinical Senate*, Asthma Australia's vision for Tasmania is in strong alignment with the Tasmanian Government's agenda for healthcare reform.

A priority area of *Our Healthcare Future* is to increasingly deliver care in the community, away from hospitals and to increase the capacity of community to support its own ongoing health needs. In line with this, Healthy Tasmania is also implementing community-based development with its *Healthy Together* projects, designed to work with communities to set health and wellbeing goals and test local solutions in partnership with local stakeholders.

Asthma Australia supports the approach that consumer-centric asthma interventions have the potential to dramatically ease the burden of asthma on the state's health system.

Asthma is a disease that can be managed effectively in the primary care system and broader community, and the majority of asthma hospitalisations and deaths are avoidable. By supporting people to develop their capability and capacity to manage their own care, and engaging communities to support the wellbeing of their members, the burden and impact of asthma can be reduced.

Asthma is a health problem that demands our attention and creativity to find a better way forward. New approaches need to focus on interventions that include targeting the risk factors shared by many population groups including marginalised communities.

There is now an opportunity for the Tasmanian Government to invest further in respiratory health, through greater focus on consumer action and empowerment. This includes by enhancing health literacy, empowering consumers to self-manage their condition and supporting consumers to play an active role in shaping health care systems and services that affect them.

The 2024-25 Budget proposals have identified work to address ways in which we can improve asthma management and the environment in which people live. This means people living with asthma in Tasmania can avoid unnecessary hospital visits, stay healthy and lead active and productive lives.

Asthma Australia recognises the intersecting issue of budget constraints for the Tasmanian Government, 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 Tasmanians living with asthma can avoid unnecessary hospital visits, stay healthy and have contributing lives.

Proposal 1: Increased investment to support Asthma Australia's work in Tasmania

On 1 July 2023, a three-year funding agreement was renewed between Asthma Australia and the Tasmanian Government for Asthma Australia to provide information and support services for the period 2023–2026.

The purpose of the agreement is for Asthma Australia to assist Tasmanians to better manage asthma through providing information, support and resources to health professionals, people with asthma and family, carers and supporters of people with asthma. Under the current funding agreement, we are:

- Driving engagement with asthma education and management information by consumers that supports their health and wellbeing (including 1800 ASTHMA service, digital channels and community level programs);
- Providing information that meets the requirements of all people encountering asthma (including health and other professionals, community, family, carers) which supports their health literacy and health promoting behaviours;
- Delivering multi-channel education and promotional campaigns that raise the profile across the community of asthma and awareness of its effective management;
- Developing collaborative actions with priority consumer groups and stakeholders that address specific asthma management issues;
- Partnering with consumers, community sector and health organisations to co-design local actions that contribute to reducing the impact of asthma on communities where the needs are greatest;
- Participating in health system initiatives to advocate for advancing outcomes for people with asthma, by influencing priority policies, systems and service models that will drive enduring change; and
- Providing information about air quality in Tasmania and climate change and health impacts to people experiencing asthma that supports their decision-making to achieve better health outcomes.

Asthma Australia’s work is pivotal in delivering evidence-based preventive health strategies—the aim of which is to improve the quality of life for people living with asthma and reduce the burden of disease—which will in turn reduce the demands on the health system.

Additional funding would increase the impact Asthma Australia can have on the health and wellbeing of people with asthma in Tasmania. The evidence clearly shows the burden of disease, and through a more targeted and intense intervention, this burden could be reduced.

The funding that Asthma Australia receives under the current funding agreement though appreciated does not enable us to have as great an impact as what is needed. In fact, it should be noted that whilst the current funding has been increased by indexation at 2.25%, salary expenses alone have increased by FairWork at the rate of 4.60% and 5.75% across the prior two-year period of activity.

The challenge faced by Asthma Australia is providing a service that is needed and is in demand but is limited by the funding received. Currently Asthma Australia is covering additional costs to match service

needs. We therefore seek an increase to our funding agreement with the Tasmanian Government to continue to deliver services to the people with asthma in Tasmania.

Asthma Australia has a proven track record in consumer education, training and support to improve health literacy, health knowledge and self-management skills. This is necessary to enable consumers to make the best decisions about their health. In the asthma context, this means giving people the information, education, resources and tools they need to prevent, control and effectively manage asthma.

INVESTMENT REQUESTED: The Tasmania Government increase its funding to Asthma Australia to a total of \$504,000 over three years to deliver a statewide asthma management program.

Item	2024–25	2025–26	2026–27
Providing Tasmanians with support in self-managing their asthma	\$160,000	\$168,000	\$176,000
TOTAL over three years			\$504,000

Proposal 2: The Asthma Smart Community Model, North West Tasmania

An Asthma Smart Community is 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. These wrap around supports include primary care, acute care, community awareness raising, unearthing community champions and building a supportive environment for people experiencing asthma.

To achieve our strategy to deliver person-centred approaches and influence systems change, we must partner with people who have lived experience of asthma. This equalises power dynamics and elevates important issues for these individuals that may not be recognised as priorities by health care providers or in the health care system. These partnerships of listening and codesigning solutions favours an approach of learning by doing—working in cycles of trying, learning and refining.

To support our vision of a network of Asthma Smart Communities in priority Tasmanian locations, Asthma Australia is co-funding with Primary Health Tasmania the Tasmanian Asthma Discovery Project, for which a Community Consultation took place in the first half of 2023. The Consultation set out to find out what life is like with asthma in Tasmania, and to set the stage for future community-led work in addressing the challenges and providing innovative solutions in partnership with community and stakeholders.

The second phase of the work is to use the information from the consultation, together with other data intelligence, to support a dynamic view of asthma in Tasmania and the community's needs, which will be finalised in mid-2024.

The Community Consultation to date has revealed insights into the experience of living with asthma in Tasmania, highlighting the need for long-term investment in developing community-based partnership and systems change initiatives that can improve people's access to, and understanding of, health information. It also pointed to the need for improving interactions with health professionals by supporting those health professionals with high quality information and education.

Importantly, it has reinforced that people with asthma highly value face-to-face support in their community, with a person who understands the complexities of life with asthma and who can help navigate the local health system.

Asthma Australia has considerable experience in implementing and initiating community-led projects, and co-design processes with people with lived experience. We have been developing projects with industry leaders through a co-design approach in other states for several years. The co-design process has allowed us to actively engage with local communities to more deeply understand how asthma impacts the lives of people with asthma, their carers and communities, and to learn about the barriers to achieving better health and wellbeing.

Asthma Australia has conducted several projects across Australia that have worked directly with community in developing community-based solutions. Projects in South Australia for example, have resulted in an Asthma Community Connector. This is a person from the community with a lived experience of asthma. The Community Connector facilitates greater access for people with asthma to better relationships with healthcare providers, provides information and resources to assist with asthma management, and gives the community a voice to communicate their asthma experience.

The Asthma Smart Community Model seeks to determine appropriate health system responses in collaboration with consumers and will be delivered in conjunction with people from the community—principally an Asthma Community Connector. We are seeking to take a similar approach to community engagement and codesign in Tasmania, in particular on the North West Coast where the hospitalisation of children with asthma is high.

INVESTMENT REQUESTED: The Tasmania Government fund Asthma Australia \$708,000 over three years to initiate the Asthma Smart Community Model in North West Tasmania.

Table 2: Request for funding of the Asthma Smart Community Model.

Program	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Asthma Smart Community model design, pilot and implementation	225,000	\$236,000	\$247,000
TOTAL over three years			\$708,000

Proposal 3: 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. 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.

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. AirSmart is the only public health campaign building the environmental health literacy of Australians at a time when air quality is becoming an increasingly important issue.
- **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.

Given the bushfire predictions for summer 2023-24 and the urgency to provide the community with access to air quality information and guidance, AirSmart provides a solution to reduce the impact of poor air quality on impacted populations.

Asthma Australia is seeking funding contributions from all governments – state, territory and federal – towards a national AirSmart campaign.

INVESTMENT REQUESTED: The Tasmanian Government contribute \$545,760 over one year to the Tasmanian component of Asthma Australia's national AirSmart public education campaign.

Table 3: Tasmanian Government requested contribution to AirSmart: Option 1 (including TV)

Item	Cost
10-week media campaign commencing Nov/Dec with free to air	\$430,000
Project management	\$45,960
App maintenance and updates	\$39,800
Evaluation	\$30,000
TOTAL	\$545,760

Cost for year 2 \$573,000

Table 4: Tasmanian Government requested contribution to AirSmart: Option 2 (excluding TV)

Item	Cost
10-week media campaign commencing Nov/Dec no free to air	\$280,000
Project management	\$41,960
App maintenance and updates	\$39,800
Evaluation	\$20,000
TOTAL	\$381,760

Cost for year 2 \$400,800

References

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- 5 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2017. *Emergency department care 2016–17: Australian hospital statistics*. Canberra: AIHW. Accessed online: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/hospitals/ahs-2016-17-emergency-departmentcare/data> (accessed 9 December 2020).
- 6 PHIDU 2019. *Asthma Atlas of Australia*. Adelaide: PHIDU. Accessed online: http://www.atlasesaustralia.com.au/asthma_aust/atlas.html (accessed 8 April 2022).
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- 9 Epidemiology Unit, Department of Health, Tasmania (unpublished data).
- 10 Epidemiology Unit, Department of Health, Tasmania (unpublished data).
- 11 Epidemiology Unit, Department of Health, Tasmania (unpublished data).
- 12 Epidemiology Unit, Department of Health, Tasmania (unpublished data).
- 13 Asthma Australia. 2020. *Bushfire Smoke Impact Survey*.
- 14 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](#)