



# Asthma Australia 2024 Queensland State Election Priorities

## Asthma in Queensland and Election Priorities

Asthma is a respiratory condition that affects 2.8 million people in Australia<sup>1</sup>, with children being the most impacted. Asthma is the leading cause of total burden of disease in children aged 1–9 years.<sup>2</sup> In Queensland, 11.4% of the population is affected by asthma, or approximately 591,700 people.<sup>3</sup>

Asthma Australia has been the leading charity for people with asthma and their communities for over 60 years. The challenges of climate change, unhealthy air, and health inequity make it more important than ever for people with asthma to have a voice. Our work is grounded in evidence and centred on the experiences of people affected by asthma. We believe by listening to those living with asthma, designing solutions with them, and influencing change, people with asthma can live freely, unrestricted by their asthma.

Asthma Australia's priorities for the 2024 Queensland State Election aim to contribute to the systemic changes needed to ensure people with asthma can live healthy lives. The priorities 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 people living with asthma in Queensland can avoid unnecessary hospital visits, stay healthy and lead active and productive lives.

### 1. Contribute funding to a 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. 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.

AirSmart fills the need for community education and guidance around air quality revealed by the 2019–2020 bushfire smoke crisis and recognised by the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.<sup>4</sup> 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 Queensland Government contribute \$3.2 million over two years to fund the Queensland component of Asthma Australia's national AirSmart public education campaign.**

### 2. Increasing access to local air quality information

Many communities around Queensland do not have access to local air quality information because there are not enough air quality monitoring stations. Air quality monitoring stations provide highly accurate information however, they require suitable locations and can be expensive to establish and run. Low-cost air quality sensors provide air quality data at a good level of accuracy and have been included as a part of the air quality monitoring network in Queensland.

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. This information is critical to ensure that people vulnerable to the health impact of air pollution exposure can protect themselves and their families.

**The Queensland Government expand the air quality sensor network to ensure more Queensland communities have access to air quality information.**

### 3. Supporting people with asthma on low incomes to install cleaner and more efficient forms of heating, cooling and cooking in their homes

Replacing gas cooktops and heaters, and wood heaters, with efficient, electric alternatives in Queensland will reduce ambient air pollution, improve health outcomes, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Investing

in measures that enable people to make their homes more energy efficient in the long term, lessens the need for ongoing rebates and bill assistance, and makes people's homes healthier places to live.

People on low incomes, living with chronic disease and in living situations where they are unable to make changes themselves, are likely to be most impacted by cost-of-living issues. They will also likely benefit the most from reduced power bills and improved living conditions in their homes.

**The Queensland Government introduce a financial support program for low-income households to replace inefficient methods of household heating and cooking to address indoor and outdoor air quality.**

#### **4: Develop and implement a housing, health and environment strategy**

The significant investment in and support for building new homes in Queensland, particularly social housing, provides a welcome opportunity to ensure new homes are climate resilient and provide residents with a healthy home environment. Queensland can be a leader by developing and implementing a housing, health and environment strategy.

A strategy is required to identify what is needed to establish healthy homes including as a social and cultural determinant of health. It would address issues such as, but not limited to, the health and population groups that are most impacted by living in poor quality or sub-standard housing, actions and mechanisms to improve the health of homes, and the factors outside the home, such as air pollution and impacts from climate change, that impact households.

**The Queensland Government develop and implement a health, housing and environment strategy to provide direction for responsible departments to work together across portfolios; and bring together stakeholders across the sectors to develop and implement the strategy.**

## Priority 1: Contribute funding to a 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.<sup>5</sup> 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, including experts from the University of Sydney and the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Planning and Environment. AirSmart was piloted in communities across southern NSW, ACT (Australian Capital Territory), and regional Victoria over a six-week period in July and August 2022. The evaluation of the pilot demonstrated strong indications that Australians want access to local, responsive air quality information and tools. Strong engagement in the campaign was evident with 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 campaign includes 15 and 30 second television commercials, a radio commercial, social and digital assets, a website, billboards, and an app.
- **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.

**The Queensland Government contribute \$3.2 million over two years to fund the Queensland component of Asthma Australia's national AirSmart public education campaign to reduce the impacts of poor air quality.**

## Priority 2: 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.<sup>6</sup> The report recognised that communities need real-time, local air quality information during periods of poor air quality.

However, many communities around Queensland 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 and have been included as a part of the air quality monitoring network in Queensland. 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 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.

Responsibility for air quality is shared by the federal and state and territory governments, with states and territories having prime responsibility for monitoring and managing air quality. All governments are required to help maintain and improve air quality and deliver on actions through the National Clean Air Agreement, which includes as one of four strategic approaches:

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.<sup>7</sup>

The National Clean Air Agreement work plan for 2021-23 includes projects on nationally consistent public air quality information and health advice. This project has a framework agreed by jurisdictions and providing guidance on low-cost sensors measuring air pollution to the public.<sup>8</sup>

Air quality sensors can cost as little as \$200 per sensor, meaning that a small investment can have a significant investment not only in recording air quality information, but also in increasing the knowledge in the community and involving them in solutions to address air quality. This information is critical to ensure that people vulnerable to the health impact of air pollution exposure can protect themselves and their families.

Investing in increasing access to local air quality information would act on the recommendations of the State of the Environment Report, as well as progressing 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.

**The Queensland Government expand the air quality sensor network to ensure more Queensland communities have access to air quality information.**

### **Priority 3: Supporting people with asthma on low incomes to install cleaner and more efficient forms of heating, cooling and cooking in their homes**

Replacing gas cooktops and heaters, and wood heaters, with efficient, electric alternatives in Queensland will reduce ambient air pollution, improve health outcomes, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Cooking with gas cooktops produces a variety of air pollutants, including fine particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide, and formaldehyde. Similarly, gas heaters produce a variety of air pollutants, and unflued gas heaters are particularly dangerous because these pollutants remain inside the home rather than being vented outside. Wood heaters also produce a range of pollutants, including fine particulate matter, which can worsen indoor air quality, as well as contributing significantly to outdoor air pollution. Exposure to these pollutants can trigger asthma flare-ups and increase the risk of developing asthma. Cooking with gas is estimated to be responsible for up to 12% of the childhood asthma burden in Australia.<sup>9</sup> People who rent or live in social housing have limited agency to replace their appliances with efficient, electric alternatives, while people on low incomes may face cost barriers.<sup>10</sup>

In 2022, Asthma Australia undertook a nationally representative survey to look at homes, health and asthma in Australia, which was completed by 5,041 people.<sup>11</sup> The survey asked participants about their current practices and preferences for heating their homes and cooking. The most common type of cooking was gas (48%) followed by electric (41%). Only 7% had an induction cooktop or a combination cooktop. While the preferred type of cooktop was gas, regardless of their cooktop preference, most people's preference is based on cooking preferences, ease of cleaning and affordability. Only 15% of respondents cited their cooktop preference was due to health reasons and 14% noted environmental reasons.

The preferred types of heating were reverse cycle air conditioning and central heating, which are the most efficient options and provide the additional benefit of cooling the air in the warmer months. However, nearly half (43%) of respondents reported they do not currently have their preferred form of heating at home. One in five respondents (22%) regularly use portable electric space heaters, 13% regularly use wood heaters, 8% regularly use flued gas heaters and 7% regularly use unflued gas heaters. For people who don't have their preferred source of heating, the most common barrier to switching is cost (43%), followed by not owning the home (32%).

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.<sup>12</sup>

Investing in measures that enable people to make their homes more energy efficient in the long term, returns on investment to the Budget through lessening the need for ongoing rebates and bill assistance, and makes people's homes healthier places to live. People on low incomes should be prioritised, as was the case with the 2023-24 Budget rebates and assistance with energy bills.

Introducing financial support for low-income households to replace inefficient and polluting methods of household heating and cooking would address health impacts associated with poor indoor and outdoor air quality, assist low-income households to address cost of living pressures and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. As noted, this is particularly important for people in situations where they are unable to make these changes due to cost or not owning their home. The scheme should include owners of rental properties to encourage them to make these replacements.

People on low incomes, living with chronic disease and in living situations where they are unable to make changes themselves, are likely to be most impacted by cost-of-living issues. They will also likely benefit the most from reduced power bills and improved living conditions in their homes.

Most State and Territory Governments have accessed joint funding with the Australian Government to fund programs for low-income households and social housing to improve energy efficiency. The Queensland Government should also use this joint funding to enable similar this investment.

The ACT Government recently announced \$5.2 million in funding to cover the up-front costs of energy efficiency upgrades and electrification for around 350 low-income households. A similar investment by the Queensland Government could have a significant impact on improving the energy efficiency of low-income households in Queensland.

**The Queensland Government introduce a financial support program for low-income households to replace inefficient methods of household heating and cooking to address indoor and outdoor air quality.**

## **Priority 4: Develop and implement a housing, health and the environment strategy**

A central platform of governments in all jurisdictions in Australia is investing in measures to build new homes and increase social housing.

The *Homes for Queenslanders* initiative has the stated aim of building 1 million new homes by 2046, including a substantial increase in social housing of 53,500 new social homes. Other aspects include fast tracking updates to local council plans, and housing design standards that simplify approvals and building times. The Queensland Climate Action plan also includes the built environment. The significant investment in new homes, particularly social housing, and the recognition of climate change, provides an opportunity to ensure new homes are climate resilient and healthy for people to live in.

However, work needs to be done to link initiatives in the health, housing and climate change portfolios and ensure potential co-benefits are recognised. Government departments and agencies should work collaboratively to maximise investment and impact across these areas.

Housing is an important determinant of health. More than 90% of our time is spent indoors, mostly inside homes.<sup>13</sup> Homes should provide residents with safe and secure spaces that support their health and wellbeing by providing shelter, sufficient space, healthy indoor air quality, thermal comfort and affordable, efficient, and healthy energy sources. Additionally, homes should be affordable and provide a sense of belonging, security, and privacy.

The importance of housing is increasing as climate change causes hazards that require people to shelter in their homes. Climate adaptation policy should therefore focus on improving housing conditions, particularly for people with asthma and others who are highly vulnerable to climate change impacts. Additionally, electrification of homes and connection to renewable energy sources can improve housing conditions, reduce energy costs, and contribute to climate change mitigation.

Asthma Australia's Housing and Asthma Policy Position Statement recommends all levels of government take action to increase access to healthy and affordable housing which in doing so will reduce asthma risks and contribute to broader health benefits.<sup>14</sup>

The Queensland Government should develop a health, housing and environment strategy to connect work in these areas and provide a framework to integrate this work across portfolios and departments. Stakeholders in these sectors should inform the development of the strategy and may be involved in its implementation.

A strategy is required to identify what is needed to establish healthy homes including as a social and cultural determinant of health. It would address issues such as, but not limited to, the health and population groups that are most impacted by living in poor quality or sub-standard housing, actions and mechanisms to improve the health of homes, and the factors outside the home, such as air pollution and impacts from climate change, that impact households.

The significant investment in and support for building new homes, particularly social housing, across jurisdictions, governments and the political spectrum provides a welcome opportunity to ensure new homes are climate resilient and healthy for people to live in. Queensland can be a leader by developing a housing, health and environment strategy.

**The Queensland Government develop and implement a health, housing and environment strategy to provide direction for responsible departments to work together across portfolios; and bring together stakeholders across the sectors to develop and implement the strategy.**



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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023) National Health Survey: Information on health behaviours, conditions prevalence, and risk factors in Australia, Reference period 2022, [National Health Survey, 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/national-health-survey-2022) (Accessed 4 January 2024)

<sup>2</sup> AIHW (2023) *Australian Burden of Disease Study 2023*. Canberra: AIHW. [Australian Burden of Disease Study 2023, Summary - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](https://www.aihw.gov.au/australian-burden-of-disease-study-2023-summary) (Accessed 9 January 2024)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (2020) Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements Report, 28 October 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (2020) Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements Report, 28 October 2020.

<sup>6</sup> 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](https://soe.dcceew.gov.au/?_gl=1*1s98wwo*_ga*NjY1NjU1NDYyLjE2Njc4NjgxMjQ.*_ga_1M2TBC9WWS*MTY2Nzg2ODEyMy4xLjEuMTY2Nzg2ODk1OC4wLjAuMA..&_ga=2.122277762.820626621.1667868124-665655462.1667868124) (Accessed 8 November 2022)

<sup>7</sup> Australian Government (2015). *National Clean Air Agreement: Towards a clean air future for all Australians*. Commonwealth of Australia.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Knibbs, Woldeyohannes, Marks, Cowie, 2018. Damp housing, gas stoves and the burden of childhood asthma in Australia. *MJA*.208(7):299–302.

<sup>10</sup> Asthma Australia, 2022. Position Statement: Climate Change, <https://asthma.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/AA-CLIMATE-CHANGE-POLICY-POSITION-OCTOBER-2022.pdf> (Accessed 3 January 2023)

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> Wood, T., Reeve, A., and Suckling, E. (2023). Getting off gas: why, how, and who should pay? Grattan Institute.

<sup>13</sup> Institute of Medicine. 2011. Climate Change, the Indoor Environment, and Health.

<https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/13115/climate-change-the-indoor-environment-and-health>

<sup>14</sup> [Asthma-Australia-Housing-and-Asthma-Policy-Position-Statement-June-2024.pdf](#)