

FROM MANY VOICES TO ONE

In 2017, Asthma Australia brought together state-based asthma foundations and the national coordinating body to create a stronger, more sustainable national organisation. Tasmania joined in 2018.

Why merge?

For decades, state and territory asthma foundations worked towards similar goals but operated independently. Multiple boards, leaders, systems and fundraising efforts created duplication and competition. Some foundations were financially strong; others struggled to maintain services. The challenge was to preserve valuable local knowledge while building a more influential national organisation.

10 CEOs	106 staff	>60% funding cut
Across the federation	Across organisations	Federal program funding reduction announced in 2017

The journey

1960s–2000	State and territory foundations emerge, alongside national coordinating bodies. Shared purpose does not translate into shared operations.
2001–2014	Merger discussions continue for over a decade. Disagreements about governance, local identity, assets and influence stall progress.
2015–2016	A memorandum of understanding, working groups and due diligence strengthen the case for change. Queensland and NSW merge first.
2017–2018	Asthma Australia Ltd forms on 1 October 2017 from Queensland/NSW, Victoria, ACT, South Australia and Asthma Australia Inc. Tasmania joins in 2018.
2019–2023	Programs and systems are integrated, capabilities strengthened and a coordinated national strategy developed.

From fragmented to coordinated

BEFORE	→	AFTER
Multiple boards and CEOs		National governance
Separate systems and services		Integrated capabilities
Competing funding efforts		Coordinated advocacy

What unlocked the merger?

Leaders reframed the question from what each organisation might lose to what people with asthma could gain. Independent facilitation, transparent organisational data and staged decisions helped build trust. A skills-based national board with jurisdictional representation addressed concerns about losing local influence. Not everyone joined. Western Australia, Northern Territory and the National Asthma Council Australia remained independent. Board-level support alone was insufficient: members and staff also needed to understand the case for change.



The real work began after the legal merger

The 2017 agreement did not instantly create one organisation. Leaders reviewed more than 130 programs and activities, deciding what to retain, combine or discontinue. Integrating systems, policies, fundraising and services took years. Some staff experienced abrupt redundancies and uncertainty, demonstrating the importance of honest, sustained communication.

What changed

- Greater efficiency. Consolidating leadership and administration reduced duplication and allowed resources to be redirected into services, research, advocacy and specialist capability.
- A stronger national voice. A unified organisation could engage more consistently with governments, clinicians, researchers and partners.
- Consumers at the centre. Consumer and professional advisory structures strengthened lived-experience input into strategy, services and advocacy.
- Capacity to innovate. Integrated data, digital channels and specialist teams supported national programs and more targeted asthma management.

2023 consumer comparisons

Compact indicators of reach, not evidence that the merger caused the differences.

Measure	Asthma Australia consumers	General adult asthma population
Preventer adherence	84%	48%
Planned asthma review	72%	60%

Figures are self-reported comparisons and do not establish causation.

Four lessons for other organisations

Lead with the beneficiaries	Keep returning to the outcomes the merger is intended to achieve, rather than protecting existing structures.
Engage beyond the boardroom	Staff, members and local stakeholders need opportunities to surface fears and shape decisions.
Make decisions transparent	Rigorous due diligence, independent facilitation and clear decision gates help overcome mistrust.
Plan for years of integration	Governance is only the start. Invest in culture, people, systems and service redesign.

The central lesson: A merger is not the outcome. It is a means to create an organisation better equipped to deliver on its purpose.