

Improving Lung Health in the ACT

Lung Foundation Australia's submission to the 2025-26
Australian Capital Territory Budget

Executive summary

Lung Foundation Australia is Australia's leading lung health peak body and national charity. Founded in 1990, we have become the trusted point-of-call for the 1 in 3 Australians living with a lung disease.

We work to improve lung health and reduce the impact of lung disease and lung cancer. To do this, we deliver information and telehealth support, facilitate access to exercise maintenance and peer support programs, coordinate education for health professionals, provide research grants, and advocate for policy change. In partnership with consumers, health professionals, researchers, and like-minded organisations, we advocate for:

- reducing risk factors and improving early diagnosis,
- equitable access to best-practice treatment and care,
- strengthened government policy, programs, and strategy, and
- improved research investment and data infrastructure.

There are more than 30 different types of lung conditions, which are a cause of significant health and economic burden in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). Lung cancer and chronic lower respiratory diseases are equal fourth leading causes of death in the territory¹. Lung conditions collectively cost the ACT healthcare system approximately \$250 million in 2022-23, that is 8% of total health spending on disease². Lung Foundation Australia have identified four priorities requiring government action to improve lung health in the ACT.

Lung Foundation Australia's priorities for the 2025-26 ACT Budget

- 1** Address lung cancer inequities by increasing Specialist Lung Cancer Nurses in the ACT.
- 2** Reduce pressure on the ACT healthcare system by investing in our Respiratory Care Program.
- 3** Fund resources and information on vaping for young people.
- 4** In recognition of the current opportunity for electoral reform, amend the Territory's *Electoral Act 1992* to ban political donations by the tobacco industry.

Lung Foundation Australia's priorities align with several policy documents, such as the ACT Preventive Health Plan, the ACT Health Services Plan, and the ACT Health Workforce Strategy. We seek your action and investment to address these priorities and promote lung health in the ACT.

Priorities on a page

1. Increase access to Specialist Lung Cancer Nurses in the ACT – \$230,000 per year over 3 years*



Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer-related death in the ACT.



Specialist lung cancer nurses enable timely and coordinated care, contributing to improved health outcomes.

2. Help fund our Respiratory Care Program to support Canberrans living with COPD – \$260,000 per year over 3 years*



COPD is a leading cause of potentially preventable hospitalisations in the ACT.



Our Respiratory Care Program reduces burden on the healthcare system.

3. Fund resources and information on vaping for young people – \$255,000 per year over 2 years*



E-cigarette use has increased significantly in recent years, especially among young people.



Resources and information will help young people navigate the new regulations and make healthy decisions.

4. In recognition of the current opportunity for electoral reform, amend the Territory's *Electoral Act 1992* to ban political donations by the tobacco industry



The tobacco industry continues to fight sensible reforms in Australia.



Banning political donations by the tobacco industry affirms that these industries should have no influence on public policy.

* Full budget available on request

Address lung cancer inequities by increasing Specialist Lung Cancer Nurses in the ACT

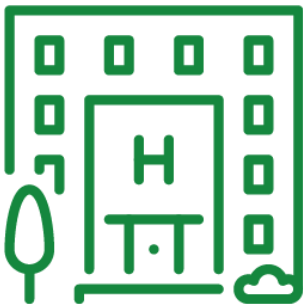
Invest \$230,000 per year over 3 years* to increase access to Specialist Lung Cancer Nurses

Lung cancer is a leading cause of disease burden in Australia. It is the most common cause of cancer-related death¹. Less than one in four people with lung cancer survive more than five years after being diagnosed³.

Lived experience research commissioned by Lung Foundation Australia earlier this year found that people with lung cancer face several barriers to effectively

managing their condition, including stigma (26% of people), lack of information and understanding about their condition (26% of people), and complexity of the healthcare system (24% of people).

The National Lung Cancer Screening Program (NLCSP) that is launching in July 2025 will reduce the burden of lung cancer in the ACT by enabling cancers to be detected earlier when treatment is more likely to be successful. To fully realise the program's potential benefits, it is essential that screening efforts are supported by timely and coordinated diagnosis and treatment. Specialist lung cancer nurses (SLCNs) are responsible for guiding patients through the complex investigation and diagnostic pathways and facilitating timely treatment and care, so they are best placed to address this need.



The Optimal Care Pathway for lung cancer care delivery states that SLCNs should be core members of multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) caring for people with lung cancer⁴. Addressing any shortfalls in SLCN workforce is now more important than ever given the upcoming launch of the NLCSP.

Lung cancer is the #1 cause of cancer death in the ACT



- 90 deaths in 2023
- Over \$15 million in health system costs in 2022-23

*Full budget available on request.

Lung Foundation Australia's Specialist Lung Cancer Nurses

The role of SLCNs is distinct from that of an oncology nurse, all-cancer nurse, or respiratory nurse given their advanced levels of practice and demonstrated in-depth knowledge, skills and expertise in lung cancer, its diagnosis, treatment, and patient supportive care needs.

Lung Foundation Australia's SLCNs are equipped to navigate the many barriers that lung cancer patients face, including stigma, and they are instrumental in helping to reduce inequities. They are a core member of the MDT, advocating for the patient at every stage to ensure their needs are met and MDT outcomes are actioned. **Lung Foundation Australia's SLCN model of care ensures support is available to patients when they need it most by specifically addressing unmet patient needs in the health service.**

As you know, the Australian Government have funded the McGrath Foundation to recruit and place 100 *All Cancer Nurses* across the country. In the first round of recruitment (35 nurses), nine *All Cancer Nurses* will work in lung cancer, with one of these nurses based in the ACT. The *All Cancer Nurses* are positioned in cancer services, supporting patients after they have received a diagnosis. There remains a critical unmet need for patients in the pre-diagnosis stage of the lung cancer care pathway (see page 15 of Lung Foundation Australia's model of care). Lung Foundation Australia SLCNs can be positioned in respiratory medicine to provide essential pre-diagnosis care that complements the *All Cancer Nurse* program (see pages 27 and 28 of Lung Foundation Australia's model of care).

Lung Foundation Australia have been working with the governments of South Australia, New South Wales, and Queensland to deliver on-the-ground SLCNs across those states, with incredibly positive outcomes achieved to date. We recommend the ACT Government fund Lung Foundation Australia SLCNs in hospitals and services where there is high unmet need. The current demand for this specialised care cannot be met by just one additional generalist cancer nurse, especially when we expect demand for lung cancer care to continue to increase because of the NLCSP. The Australian Government is taking a vital first step in funding *All Cancer Nurses*, but this support for patients must be met with increased investment in the lung cancer nurse workforce by state and territory governments, and Lung Foundation Australia's evaluated SLCN model can help meet this need. To encourage seamless integration, Lung Foundation Australia SLCNs are preferably employed by the health service where they work, with Lung Foundation Australia funded to support training, supervision, service evaluation, professional development, and other activities as required.

*Full budget available on request.

When a Specialist Lung Cancer Nurse is involved:

- ✓ **44% more likely** to have access to needed treatment.
- ✓ **75% less likely** to present to an Emergency Department.

Reduce pressure on the ACT healthcare system by investing in our Respiratory Care Program

Invest \$260,000 per year over 3 years* in the vital Respiratory Care Program

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a term that describes chronic lung diseases characterised by obstructed airflow, including emphysema, chronic bronchitis, and chronic asthma. Breathlessness is the key symptom. COPD results from long-term exposure to irritants, most often cigarette smoke, but also occupational hazards and air pollution. COPD is a progressive, chronic lung condition that leads to increasing breathing difficulty, disability, and premature death.

The impact of COPD in the ACT

Prevalence: more than 11,000 people living with COPD

Hospitalisations: third leading cause of potentially preventable hospitalisations among chronic conditions – more than diabetes

Health system costs: more than \$24 million in 2022-23



Although there is no cure for COPD, the condition is inherently treatable. Early diagnosis and evidence-based interventions can slow the progression of the disease and allow people to live well. Earlier this year, Lung Foundation Australia commissioned research to better understand the lived experiences of people living with or caring for someone with a lung condition. Participants reported difficulties in accessing primary healthcare services due to limited availability and long wait times. Compared to all respondents, people with COPD were significantly more likely to report waiting too long to see a GP and then needing to go to hospital. One in four people with COPD stated that finding a GP with a good understanding of lung disease was a barrier to effectively managing their condition, as was lack of information and understanding about how to manage their lung disease. There is a need to expand access to structured information and support services that can complement and enhance primary healthcare services. Most importantly, it is essential that support is available to enable people to manage their health and stay well through the current cost-of-living pressures.

1 in 4 people with COPD say lack of information and understanding is a barrier to being able to effectively manage their condition.

*Full budget available on request.

Lung Foundation Australia's Respiratory Care Program

Our Respiratory Care Program aims to improve patient engagement with their healthcare teams and encourage effective self-management. The service identifies gaps in evidence-based care and provides participants with the information and support required to address these. The program comprises three clinician-led telephone appointments conducted over four to six months, plus a follow-up call 12 months after the final session.

Our Respiratory Care Program is free to consumers, promoting equitable access to support regardless of financial means. We view this as being essential in the context of current cost-of-living pressures, which are making it very difficult for many to afford necessary health care. Earlier this year, Lung Foundation Australia conducted a survey to understand the impact of recent cost-of-living pressures on people living with a lung condition (N=~700). Respondents reported having made numerous changes to their use of health care due to cost-of-living pressures, such as cutting back on allied health services (40%), reducing GP appointments (30%), delaying tests and scans (18%), and changing from a private specialist to the public system (15%)⁵. People with a lung condition are especially vulnerable to cost-of-living pressures as they experience higher out-of-pocket costs than other chronic conditions and are more likely to skip health care as a result⁶.

Since 2019, **more than 1,000 Australians living with COPD** have been clients of our Respiratory Care Program. The program is supported by a rigorous data collection protocol. A

"I have received invaluable information that has allowed me to undertake respiratory testing and medical follow-up including medication review. I have also ceased smoking."

- Participant of Lung Foundation Australia's Respiratory Care Program

statistically significant 32% decrease in emergency department presentations was observed among the clients who had completed the program by September 2024. Similar findings have been demonstrated in an earlier independent evaluation of the service⁷.

Care Program. Our recommendation aligns with the [ACT Health Services Plan 2022-2030](#) and the [ACT Health Workforce Strategy](#). The recommendation also aligns to Quality Statement 3 and 9 from the [COPD Clinical Care Standard](#), recently released by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care.

We recommend the ACT Government commit to investing in the vital Respiratory

We also note that this modest recommendation of \$260,000 annually, amounts to just 1% of the current health system expenditure on this treatable and manageable chronic condition in the ACT.

*Full budget available on request.

Lung Foundation Australia's Respiratory Care Program is:

- ✓ **Free to consumers**, providing vital health support without added cost-of-living pressure.
- ✓ **Evidence based and cost effective**, helping to relieve pressure on the health system.
- ✓ **Accessible across Australia**, promoting equitable health outcomes.

Address gaps in e-cigarette resources and information for priority young people

Invest \$255,000 per year over 2 years* in vaping resources and information for young people

The number of people using e-cigarettes has increased significantly over the last few years, particularly among young adults. We recognise that the recent Federal vaping reforms will substantially reduce e-cigarette use in Australia. With a rapidly changing policy environment and evidence continuing to emerge, it is important that updated information and resources are available to encourage healthy behaviours in young people.

Lung Foundation Australia have developed a wide range of e-cigarette resources, such as:

- Co-designed factsheets for young people, their parents and carers, and educators,
- Free vaping e-learning module,
- Co-designed animated short videos, and factsheet for First Nations young people,
- Factsheets on the environmental impacts of e-cigarettes and vaping and mental health.

"They [vaping videos] provided me [with] information about things I wouldn't have known about. It has taught me a lot about it."

Lung Foundation Australia's e-cigarette resources are in high demand. They have been used and promoted by health departments, education departments, schools, non-government organisations, and more. We are proud to co-design and collaborate to produce meaningful and impactful resources that improve knowledge and change behaviour.



We recommend the ACT Government fund Lung Foundation Australia to expand and disseminate new and existing information and resources on e-cigarettes for young people, particularly those from underserved groups. Our recommendation aligns with objectives from the ACT Preventive Health Plan 2020-2025 and the associated action plan for 2023-2025.

*Full budget available on request.

In recognition of the current opportunity for electoral reform, ban political donations of any type by the tobacco industry

Amend the Territory's *Electoral Act 1992* to ban political donations by the tobacco industry

Our obligations as a signatory to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control compel Australia to ban political donations from the tobacco industry, as does the endorsement of the [National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030](#) and the [National Tobacco Strategy 2023-2030](#) by all Australian jurisdictions.

Legislating a ban on political donations from the tobacco industry operationalises the stated principle of ACT's main political parties (ACT Labor, Canberra Liberals, and The Greens) to not accept tobacco industry donations. The ACT Government already bans donations from certain entities, such as property developers and their associates. At a time when the tobacco industry continues to fight sensible tobacco and e-cigarette reforms, both in Australia and globally, banning donations from the tobacco industry would send a clear message that the tobacco industry should have no influence on Australian public policy.

Action 1.4 of the National Tobacco Strategy:

Develop and implement measures to prohibit contributions from the tobacco industry and those working to further its interests to political parties, candidates, or campaigns.



This policy reform is possible, with New South Wales currently the only Australian jurisdiction to ban political donations from the tobacco industry. We note that the ACT Government are conducting an inquiry into the operation of the *Electoral Act 1992*, which Lung Foundation Australia will be making a submission to. The inquiry provides the ACT Government with the opportunity to future proof interference by the tobacco industry. This recommendation aligns with objectives from the [ACT Preventive Health Plan 2020-2025](#) and the associated action plan for 2023-2025.

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