



PARLIAMENT HOUSE OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Federal Member for Leichhardt
JILL HALL MP
Federal Member for Shortland

Media Release

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Federal MPs call for priority funding for Australia's fifth¹ largest killer– COPD

The Parliamentary Friends of COPD today welcomed a new proposal calling upon the Federal Government to improve access to diagnosis and treatment for the up to one in six² Australians aged 45 or over who may have Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) also known as emphysema and chronic bronchitis .

Champions of the newly-formed Parliamentary Friends of COPD – Warren Entsch and Jill Hall – have publicly urged their colleagues from both sides of politics to support a funding submission from The Australian Lung Foundation which could dramatically improve many of the lives of more than one million^{2,3} Australians estimated to have COPD and save Australian taxpayers up to \$264 million over four years.⁴

The proposal is also supported by the Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand, National Asthma Council, Asthma Foundations of Australia, Australian Respiratory Council and Australian Asthma and Respiratory Educators' Association.

Parliamentary Friends of COPD was formed this year following a submission by The Australian Lung Foundation to the Federal Government's Inquiry into Health Funding

"COPD is Australia's fifth biggest killer and the third leading cause of disease burden after heart disease and stroke," Mr Entsch said. "In order to help protect the lives of people with the condition, we need to ensure they can be appropriately diagnosed and treated."

COPD is a long-term disease of the lungs that includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis, which causes shortness of breath. It is estimated to cost Australia \$800-900 million a year, with the actual economic burden estimated to be much higher due to misdiagnosis of COPD.⁵

"As well as the financial burden, COPD also has a great personal cost, tragically limiting and shortening the lives of too many Australians," he said.

Ms Hall said Australia's ageing population meant the need to better identify and manage COPD comes at a crucial time. The proportion of Australians aged over 50 is expected to grow from around 29 per cent (5.7 million) in 2002 to between 46 per cent and 50 per cent (11.5 million to 14.3 million) by 2051.⁶

"It is not just a matter of additional resources, but also how they are focused, how they are managed and how they are delivered into the community," Ms Hall said. "The current submission goes a long way into looking at how a framework can be driven by the

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Commonwealth in partnership with the jurisdictions in a genuine whole-of-government approach," she said.

The submission makes six recommendations to Federal Government:⁴

1. Increase access to pulmonary rehabilitation, which helps reduce people's breathlessness so they stay out of hospital and often go back to activities which they have had to give up
2. Improve diagnosis of COPD through enhanced access to lung function testing (otherwise known as spirometry testing) in GP surgeries
3. Ensure equity of access to home oxygen therapy
4. Direct funding to epidemiological research
5. Improve diagnosis of COPD through increased community awareness
6. Increase funding to enhance self-management strategies for COPD patients

Recent Australian research* supports the need for urgent Federal Government backing, revealing people with COPD are under-diagnosed and under-treated:⁷

- Two-thirds (66.7%) have seen their doctor with breathing problems, but only half of these recall having a lung function test.
- Less than half (48.7%) have been prescribed medication for their breathing.

The Australian Lung Foundation encourages people over 45 to see their GP about simple lung function test if they have two or more of the following:

- Shortness of breath compared with others their age,
- A repetitive cough with phlegm or mucus most days,
- Smoker or an ex-smoker.

People with COPD and their carers can contact the Australian Lung Foundation to find local support groups, to get information to help them understand and best manage their condition. For further information, help and support please call 1800 654 301 or visit www.lungnet.com.au

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Editor's notes:

- (*) Research undertaken among a random sample of 1,224 Australian adults aged between 45 and 70. They were classified as either COPD-only, asthma-only or both asthma and COPD.⁷ Results summarised in this media release relate to the COPD-only group.
- A full copy of the Australian Lung Foundation's submission to Federal Government can be accessed on-line at: www.lungnet.com.au

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