



Expert story – Asthma medications cost less on the PBS



Asthma is a common chronic lung condition that affects the airways. In Australia, around 2.7 million people had asthma in 2020-21, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data.¹

Clinical executive lead at the National Asthma Council Australia and advanced practice pharmacist, Debbie Rigby, says there are two main types of asthma medication – relievers and preventers.

"Relievers are short-acting medicines to help with symptoms of asthma," says Debbie.

"Most adults and adolescents with asthma, according to Australian guidelines, should be taking a preventer every day to avoid asthma flare ups."

On 1 January this year, the Australian Government reduced the maximum amount people can pay for most medicines listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) from \$42.50 to \$30.

"Most asthma medications are listed on the PBS," says Debbie. "For families where multiple members have asthma, which is typical, it will make a real difference to them."

Recent ABS data shows more than three quarters of a million people put off buying medication in the 2021-22 financial year because of the cost.

"We know that some people skip getting scripts dispensed and reduce doses of their preventers because they can't afford it, and this reduction in cost will hopefully make a significant difference to those people and families," Debbie says.

"The reduction in cost and subsequent improvement in adherence to preventers will have a real impact on people's day-to-day lives and potentially reduce the number of serious asthma flare ups, which lead people to see their GP or go to hospital. It is also savings for the health system.

"It's important to get the message out that people should not skip or delay medication due to cost, which can lead to poorer health outcomes, missing school or work, or hospitalisation due to flare ups."

For more information visit health.gov.au/pbs

¹ Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Asthma 2020-21 financial year.