CANBERRA LUNG LIFE SUPPORT GROUP

Submission to Inquiry into the impacts on health of air quality in Australia

The members of **The Canberra Lung Life Support Group** are pleased that there is an inquiry into the impacts on health of air quality in Australia. With our poor or diseased lungs, it is important to us to be able to breathe air that is as clean as possible. We urge you to take note of the medical, social and financial information that you will be given by expert sources and to ensure that the air is as clean as possible.

The Canberra Lung Life Support Group is a support group for people with chronic lung conditions and/or diseases. The pre-dominant condition is COPD but we have a variety of other lung conditions such as bronchiectasis and pulmonary fibrosis.

We know that there are many such groups around Australia and we know that lung disease is a significant health issue with more than 2.6 million Australians aged 35 years or over affected (www.lungfoundation.com.au Oct 2012). **The Lung Foundation Australia,** the national organisation for lung disease, puts lung disease as the leading cause of death and disease after heart disease, stroke and cancer. Of that, COPD accounts for 2.1 million. The estimate for asthma is 2.1 million. Little is known about numbers of people with the other lung diseases, not to mention respiratory infections.

So there are a significant number of Australians who have breathing difficulties and this has associated costs to the community as well as to the individual through hospitalisation, absenteeism and loss of productivity. We may have to retire from work early. We do experience a change in the quality of our life and lifestyle through our conditions.

Our breathing may be limited so that we cannot walk far or be as active as we would like. Some of us use oxygen to assist our daily living; some are on oxygen 24 hours a day, at some considerable expense. Some cough embarrassingly. All of us are restricted in the amount of activity we can do and we need to remain as healthy as possible to retain our quality of life. Some of us have been forced to install high efficiency air filters in our homes, at considerable expense, so that we can breathe comfortably at least in our homes.

To help us remain as healthy as possible, we would like to breathe as clean air as possible. Polluted air affects our lungs and diminishes our ability to breathe effectively. Many of the polluting particles stay in the lungs once they are breathed in, gradually limiting the lungs' effectiveness. For us with poor lung function, this is a further disadvantage. We may suddenly find ourselves unable to breathe as before; or cough uncontrollably; or choke and gasp for breath. We may have an exacerbation which necessitates hospitalisation. Each exacerbation affects the lungs permanently and diminishes our ability to breathe effectively.

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In Canberra, we have been having an ongoing debate about wood heater smoke and we know that smoke from wood heaters contains many pollutants that are dangerous to the health. It is clear that even the smaller particles, PM 2.5, can be breathed in and are dangerous to health.

We would like to see standards to be set at less than 2.5PM for wood heater smoke. We know that this can be done as it has been done already in other cities and countries.

Conclusion

We know that other submissions will contain all the factual details about air quality and disease. We would like to emphasise the point that we are affected – often markedly – by pollution in the air because of our limited lung health and our limited lung capacity – and many Australians are in a similar position. For this reason, we very strongly support any steps to reduce air pollution. For our continued health and quality of life, we want to breathe the cleanest air possible wherever we are.

Helen Cotter, co-ordinator
Canberra Lung Life Support Group

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