



MEDIA RELEASE

12 December 2001

ASTHMA DEATH TOLL RISES National Asthma Council Urges Vigilance

Concerning new statistics released today by the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that the annual asthma death toll has risen slightly with 454 deaths recorded last year.

Although the increase is marginal – 30 more than the previous year – asthma experts are concerned that the data may indicate less vigilance about asthma prevention strategies, which have been attributed with helping cut the death rate in previous years.

This is the first increase recorded since the ABS adopted new World Health Organisation coding rules for asthma deaths a few years ago.

The National Asthma Council, Australia's peak asthma body, believes stronger measures are necessary and is calling upon Australians to take their asthma seriously.

According to the Council's chairman, Dr Ron Tomlins, any death from asthma is potentially preventable.

"While there is still no cure for asthma, we now know so much about how to manage it and there have been so many advances in medications, that any death from asthma today is a real tragedy," Dr Tomlins said. Working with all people with asthma to get best possible control of their symptoms is the key to fewer deaths from asthma and better health.

"We need to take stock of these new statistics and use them to remind the community, and doctors and pharmacists, that asthma can kill.

"We simply can't afford to let this hiccup in the stats become a new trend," he said.

"We all need to work much harder together to improve the health of people with asthma. We have significantly reduced the death rate over the last decade and new initiatives such as the federal government's rollout of the National Asthma Council's 3+ Visit Plan for GPs and people with moderate or severe asthma will be an important strategy for achieving this."

Dr Tomlins also believes that the designation of asthma as a national health priority and significant funding from the Australian government are other important steps in further raising awareness and understanding of the condition and how serious it can be.

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A number of age groups needs special investigation. The small increase in the 5-9 age group is of concern. The decrease in the 15-24 group is encouraging. We will need to concern ourselves particularly with the 25-50 age group where there is an overall increase.

Dr Tomlins believes that education is the key and that parents, carers and educators can take a more active role in helping monitor and manage younger people's asthma. The Asthma Friendly Schools program prepares parents, teachers and children for this.

"The big challenge in 2002 will be to ensure that older people with asthma are not neglected. Other illnesses or disabilities can contribute to the impact of asthma on a person's health and a team approach may be essential," Dr Tomlins said.

For the past decade the National Asthma Council has been educating Australians about asthma and better asthma management practices. The National Asthma Council is a collaboration of the Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand, The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia, Asthma Australia representing the State Asthma Foundations and the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy.

Currently more than two million Australians have asthma.

Asthma affects one in four children, one in seven adolescents and one in 10 adults.

INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITY:

To coincide with the release of the latest asthma deaths data, National Asthma Council chairman, Dr Ron Tomlins is available to discuss the data, its public health implications and the state of asthma in Australia in general.

Ends/.

For media enquiries and/or to arrange an interview with Dr Tomlins, please call Caroline James on tel: (03) 9289 9555 or 0413 481 579.



ASTHMA DEATHS 1997 – 2000 (sex by 5 year age groups)

AGE	1997		1998		1999		2000	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
0-4	2	3	-	2	-	3	-	-
5-9	1	2	3	1	-	2	5	4
10-14	6	1	5	1	5	3	1	2
15-19	4	5	6	6	5	2	1	-
20-24	7	3	2	6	9	6	1	2
25-29	3	4	4	11	4	4	6	7
30-34	6	7	5	7	4	8	9	10
35-39	7	5	1	7	4	3	6	10
40-44	9	14	4	5	5	5	6	7
45-49	6	9	9	9	5	12	12	15
50-54	15	7	9	19	8	15	13	14
55-59	14	19	9	16	9	17	7	15
60-64	13	13	14	17	11	17	15	12
65-69	21	30	29	18	17	23	17	28
70-74	18	26	24	34	12	27	18	32
75-79	33	34	18	31	21	31	18	34
80-84	20	37	32	40	16	25	16	31
85+	22	75	13	64	25	61	18	62
Total	207	292	187	294	160	264	169	285
TOTAL	499		481		424		454	