

Improving childhood asthma management in Melbourne's inner west

Program overview

Melbourne's inner west is benefiting from a Victorian Government investment of \$1.788M over two years to help children living with asthma. The funding is part of the government's commitment to a [range of initiatives](#) to improve air quality and liveability of Melbourne's inner west.

The impact of air quality on childhood asthma was articulated in a 2020 commissioned report from the [Inner West Air Quality Reference Group](#) and an analysis, undertaken by the Department of Health, revealed that families and carers can encounter a range of challenges and barriers that come with accessing and navigating the asthma care system.

Six key issues were identified as important to address to reduce these challenges and barriers and enable consistent, joined-up and appropriate support and care for inner-west families and children with asthma. These issues were conceived as six projects to be undertaken from mid-2022 to mid-2023, collectively called the *Improving Childhood Asthma Management – Inner West* (ICAM) program. The goal of the program is to generate system-wide improvements – through the combined impact of these projects – that increase the quality of life and health outcomes for children with asthma in the inner west.

A 'systems approach' towards the right care, from the right person, at the right time

The "asthma care system" refers to the organisations and individuals (such as GPs, local hospitals, schools, pharmacies, sporting and community bodies, children with asthma and their carers) and how they interact with each other (including the tools, processes and practices used) when providing or receiving care. The ICAM program aims to improve quality, consistency, connectivity and integration of the local asthma care system through delivery of the six rapid and targeted projects, described below.

Asthma Australia, Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, Safer Care Victoria, National Asthma Council Australia and cohealth have been engaged to deliver the projects, working in partnership with each other and the Department of Health. The program is also benefiting from the support and involvement of the North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network and Western Health.



Improving utility of asthma action plans

We know asthma action plans are very useful in managing a child's asthma however, plans are sometimes viewed as little more than 'paperwork'. This project will increase the use and utility of asthma action plans for managing a child's asthma, whether at home, school or in the health care setting, and is led by the nation's peak consumer asthma body, [Asthma Australia](#).



Developing clinical practice guidelines for childhood asthma

We have excellent *Australian Asthma Handbook Guidelines* for managing asthma, but we also need high quality, straightforward guidance for clinicians to use in a fast-paced clinical setting. Clinical practice guidelines will be developed for pre-school and primary school-aged children for managing asthma and wheeze. This project is led by the [Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne](#).



Developing and promoting integrated care pathways through the asthma care system

Navigating the asthma care system can be just as complex for professionals and organisations as it can be for families and carers. By improving coordination and communication between health providers and support services and establishing clear ‘pathways for care’ we aim to help families get what they need, when they need it, from the best source. This project is led by the Victorian Government’s organisation for improving delivery of better, safer healthcare, [Safer Care Victoria](#).



Establishing a community of practice for those involved in the asthma care system

There are many passionate and skilled professionals in the asthma care system. A community of practice is designed to bring these people together to establish ongoing relationships, share their knowledge and skills, and create opportunities for collaboration and care. This learning network will also review data and changes made to the local asthma care system to ensure they are bringing about sustained improvements for children with asthma in the inner west. This project is also led by [Safer Care Victoria](#).



Delivering education for local asthma care providers

There is excellent asthma education available for care providers, however, it’s not always easy to find locally relevant information to provide extra value for children with asthma and their carers. Education packages for clinical and non-clinical care providers will be developed to provide locally-tailored information based on best-practice asthma care, creating consistent and high level knowledge and understanding of childhood asthma management. This project is led by Australia’s national authority for asthma knowledge, setting the standard for asthma care, [National Asthma Council Australia](#).



Improving asthma self-management

The day-to-day management of asthma symptoms is undertaken by the families and children with asthma themselves. Feeling enabled to take charge of your own care requires access to support from, and trust in, your care providers, as well as personal knowledge and skills. The goal of this project is to address barriers and enhance enablers to self-management at the system level, as well as increasing skills and confidence at the individual level. This project is led by not-for-profit community health organisation for Melbourne’s west, [cohealth](#).

A parallel project – ‘Breathe Melbourne’

A parallel project that aligns with the goals of the ICAM program, is also being supported. The project, known as [Breathe Melbourne](#), is a citizen science project led by Deakin University with funding and support from the Department of Health, the Environment Protection Authority and the Department of Transport. *Breathe Melbourne* aims to engage primary school children in the inner west to learn about science through air quality monitoring technology. The ICAM program will be informed by the results of *Breathe*’s school community survey, which asks about knowledge and experience with asthma care.

How to find out more

For enquiries regarding the *Improving Childhood Asthma Management – Inner west* program email the Department of Health icam@health.vic.gov.au. For project specific enquiries, contact the lead organisation.



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