

MEDIA RELEASE

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FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INVESTS \$500K TO IMPROVE HEALTH AND QUALITY OF LIFE FOR AUSTRALIANS WITH ALLERGIC DISEASES

Monday 16 May 2016: Strengthening its commitment to improve the health and quality of life of Australians with allergic diseases, the Australian government today announced funding of \$500,000 toward Australia's National Allergy Strategy.

The National Allergy Strategy, launched in August 2015, was developed in partnership by the two leading medical and patient organisations for allergy in Australia - the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA) and Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia (A&AA) - and in consultation with some sixty other key stakeholder organisations.

The Turnbull government's funding boost was announced today at the launch of Food Allergy Week 2016 in Sydney. It will provide support for the implementation of three urgent National Allergy Strategy initiatives:

- Standardising drug allergy management
- Improving allergy management for teens and young adults, and
- Allergy management in food service including in the hospital setting.

Allergic diseases now affect approximately one in five Australiansⁱ. Food allergy induced anaphylaxis has doubled in the last 10 years with one in 10 infants born in Australia each year - around 30,000 - now having a food allergyⁱⁱ.

Dr. Richard Loh, Co-chair of the National Allergy Strategy and immediate past President of ASCIA, welcomed today's funding announcement.

"The funding of the important initiatives within the National Allergy Strategy will go part way to reducing the burden of allergic diseases on individuals, their families, food service providers and the health sector. Allergic disease is challenging; currently almost all conditions need to be managed as there is no cure. We need to be working together to reduce the burden on all, including the health system," said Dr Loh.

"This investment is much-needed progress in addressing the challenge of allergic disease in Australia and it will help us to deliver crucial services," said Dr Loh. We need to standardise drug allergy management and better educate those with allergic disease, including their carers and health professionals. It's also critical we engage with food service providers and increase safety and improve the allergy management of teens and young adults - as they are most at risk of fatal anaphylaxis.

"There is no cure for allergic disease. These important initiatives will mean more timely, accurate diagnoses and optimal, ongoing care of Australians with allergic disease. It will mean a reduction in misdiagnosis and unnecessary prescriptions and investigations and, most importantly, a reduction in allergic reactions and improved emergency treatment when they do happen, potentially saving lives," said Dr. Loh.

According to Maria Said, Co-chair of the National Allergy Strategy and President of Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia, Australia has one of the highest rates of food allergy in the world with hospital admissions for severe allergic reactions increasing four-fold in the last 20 yearsⁱⁱⁱ.

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“We’re seeing delayed access to medical care and long waiting times for the management of allergic diseases and this is a major problem,” commented Ms. Said. “Compounding this, we have an ever-escalating number of diagnosed patients and a relatively low number of appropriately trained health care professionals to treat them.”

The National Allergy Strategy will meet these challenges head on with broad reaching education programs aimed specifically toward upskilling health professionals, consumers with allergic disease and those working in the food service sector.

“Eating food outside the home, even in healthcare facilities, is currently a bigger risk than it should be. We need to better educate consumers and better educate food service and healthcare professionals. We have to take on this challenge as a broader community because allergic disease affects communities, not just individuals,” stated Ms. Said.

“The funding announcement is a very welcome acknowledgment of the progress already made within the National Allergy Strategy and we are enormously grateful to Minister Ley,” said Dr. Loh. “This is the first stage implementation of a long-term strategy and we look forward to continuing our work with the federal government and all stakeholders to improve the lives of Australians with allergic disease and those who care for them.”

For further information, please visit www.nationalallergystrategy.org.au.

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About Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia

A&AA is a charitable, not-for-profit organisation that aims to improve awareness of allergy in the community through education, advocacy and support. A&AA develops a range of educational materials, resources, workshops and seminars. Part of an international alliance of like-minded organisations, A&AA works closely with peak medical bodies including the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA). Visit www.allergyfacts.org.au.

About Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology (ASCIA)

ASCIA was established in 1990 as a not for profit, peak professional medical organisation for allergy and clinical immunology in Australia and New Zealand. ASCIA members include clinical immunology/allergy specialists, other medical practitioners, scientists and allied health professionals who work in the areas of allergy and immunology. The mission of ASCIA is to advance the science and practice of allergy and clinical immunology, by promoting the highest standard of medical practice, education and research, to improve the health and quality of life of people with allergic diseases, immunodeficiencies and other immune diseases. For further information go to www.allergy.org.au.

About Food Allergy Week

Food Allergy Week is an initiative of Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia that aims to increase awareness of food allergy in the community in an effort to promote understanding and help protect those at risk. This year the week takes place from Sunday 15th to Saturday 21st May 2016 under the theme of ‘Be Aware. Show You Care’. For further information and resources go to www.foodallergyaware.com.au.

ⁱ Mullins RJ, et al. The economic impact of allergic diseases in Australia: not to be sneezed at. ASCIA/Access Economics Report, November 2007. <http://www.allergy.org.au/ascia-reports/economic-impact-of-allergies>.

ⁱⁱ Osborne NJ, Koplinski J, Martin PE, Gurrin LC, Lowe AJ, Matheson MC, Ponsonby AL, Wake M, Tang ML, Dharmage SC, Allen KL; HealthNuts Investigators. Prevalence of challenge-proven IgE-mediated food allergy using population-based sampling and predetermined challenge criteria in infants. *J Allergy Clin Immunol*. 2011 Mar; 127 (3):668-76

ⁱⁱⁱ Mullins RJ, Dear K, Tang ML. Characteristics of childhood peanut allergy in the Australian Capital Territory 1995-2007. *J Allergy Clin Immunol* 2009; 123: 689-93