

MEDIA RELEASE

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Asthma death toll skyrocketing in South Australia

South Australians with asthma are being warned about the dangers of poor health management after the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported a startling 60 per cent increase in the state's asthma-related death toll.

New data, release by the ABS this month, shows the condition is impacting the health of South Australians more than ever before, with 45 people dying of asthma in SA in 2006, compared to 28 in 2005.

Nationally, there was a 26.4 per cent increase in deaths recorded, with 402 Australians losing their life to asthma in 2006.

Dr Mariastella Pulvirenti, Health and Research Manager at the Asthma Foundation of SA, said the ABS data had shocked health care professionals and the Foundation itself, because the number of deaths had been decreasing steadily for approximately five years prior to 2006.

"In Australia, more than two million patients suffer from asthma – one of the highest rates in the world – but the fact that SA has seen almost three times the national increase in asthma-related deaths is a warning sign for all patients and family carers to be more vigilant," said Ms Pulvirenti.

Foundation President, Max Franchitto, said the increase in asthma-related deaths is of great concern, and better management of the condition was essential to reversing the upward trend.

"These alarming statistics have raised the issue of breathlessness as a very serious problem," said Mr Franchitto. The Foundation is a readily available resource for those with breathing difficulties, and people should understand that with the right information and support they can control their asthma.

The 2006 ABS figures show that asthma was the underlying cause of death for almost twice as many females as males, with 53 male deaths for every 100 female deaths.

The greatest increase in deaths occurred in the senior age bracket, with 273 asthma deaths recorded among over 70s.

Mr Franchitto urged people with asthma to maintain their Asthma Action Plans, review their medications frequently, consult their doctors regularly and be wary of their triggers.

The Foundation's Breathe Better Centre provides information to the public through its free health line (1800 645 130), website (<http://www.breathebetter.com.au>) and regular Live Well sessions.

Awareness of asthma will be raised through World Asthma Day, Tuesday May 6th, when the Foundation in partnership with the Women's and Children's Hospital will host a morning tea at the Hospital's Playdeck from 11am.

**For media information please contact Silvia Knoppien of [communicate et al](mailto:silvia@communicate.net.au)
on 8331 1444 or 0415 182 856 // silvia@communicate.net.au**