

Foreword



The statistics behind asthma will be known to almost everyone reading this report. A disease affecting 2.2 million Australians, it reaches across all age groups. One in six children of primary-school age has asthma, while, at the other end of the spectrum, chronic asthma affects up to 10% of people aged over 65. In recent years, the figures have improved, but the incidence of asthma in Australian society remains unacceptably high.

Four years ago, in response to the widespread nature of the disease, the Macquarie Bank Foundation made asthma one of its key areas of funding support. The Foundation agreed to commit \$1 million to asthma research over 5 years and earmarked a number of programs to be established in partnership with the Asthma Foundations of Australia.

One of the key initiatives of the partnership was the establishment of a biennial research colloquium, bringing together the nation's leading researchers to discuss specific aspects of asthma. The inaugural research colloquium in 2002 looked into the issue of childhood asthma and was considered pivotal in increasing awareness of the issue and setting future research priorities.¹

The second colloquium, held in 2004, considered asthma in the older Australian and is the subject of this special report. This was the first time a research forum had focused specifically on this issue and the extent to which asthma is misdiagnosed or

under-diagnosed in our society. It was also a particularly timely discussion, given the current focus on the ageing population.

The partnership between the Macquarie Bank Foundation and the Asthma Foundations of Australia has delivered in several other key areas. Initiatives include the establishment of a national website (www.asthmaresearch.org.au) to capture and communicate asthma research activities undertaken in Australia and overseas, PhD scholarships to encourage talented young scientists to develop a career in asthma lifestyle research, and travel grants to give young researchers international experience.

Most importantly, the Macquarie Bank National Asthma Research Fund was established last year, with \$350 000 funding from the Macquarie Bank Foundation, the Australian Government and the Asthma Foundations of Australia. It is the first national fund established specifically for asthma research and will guide the future direction of research into the disease.

Australian scientists are world leaders in asthma research, and the findings of the 2004 research colloquium highlight the depth of this expertise. The findings will also provide a strong foundation for the fight against asthma in older Australians.

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¹ Early childhood asthma. What we know and what we need to know. *Med J Aust* 2002; 177 (6 Suppl): S33-S80. □