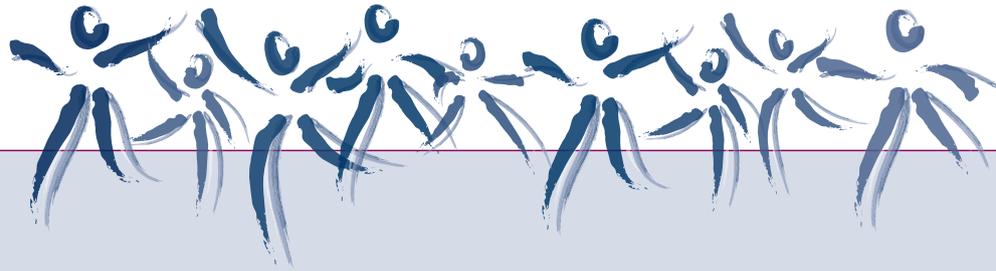


6. Management



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Key points

Asthma action plans

- The majority of people with asthma do not have a written asthma action plan, despite national guidelines recommending their use for the management of asthma for nearly 20 years.
- Young men and those living in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas are less likely to possess a written asthma action plan than others.

Medications used to treat asthma

- Drug therapy is the mainstay of asthma management.
- The use of almost all medications for asthma increases with age.
- The pattern of use of asthma therapies is quite different in children compared with adults.
- Use of inhaled corticosteroids is less common in children than in adults with asthma.
- Most children using inhaled corticosteroids are only dispensed one prescription per year.
- Children are more commonly prescribed the less potent formulations of inhaled corticosteroids while prescriptions for combination formulations containing long-acting beta-agonists are relatively uncommon in children.
- Among adults, the majority of inhaled corticosteroids are prescribed in combination with long-acting beta-agonists.
- There has been a recent reduction in prescribing the most potent formulations of inhaled corticosteroids.
- Intermittent use of inhaled corticosteroids is the most common mode of use in adults and children, despite treatment guidelines recommending regular use in people with persistent asthma.

Introduction

This chapter will review data relating to the use of effective asthma management strategies and their implementation in the Australian population. The two elements of asthma management that are discussed here are the possession of *written asthma action plans* and *regular use of medications* that control the disease and prevent exacerbations. Based on evidence accumulated in the last two decades, these represent key elements in the effective management of the condition.

6.1 Written asthma action plans

A written asthma action plan enables people with asthma to recognise deterioration in their condition promptly and respond appropriately, by integrating changes in symptoms or peak expiratory flow measurements with written instructions to adjust medication. The aim of an asthma action plan is to help the process of early intervention and to prevent or reduce the severity of acute asthma episodes. It has been found that use of a written asthma action plan reduces the need for extra medication, urgent visits to doctors, hospitalisations and deaths as well as improves lung function (Abramson et al. 2001; Gibson et al. 2004). Written asthma action plans have formed part of national guidelines for the management of asthma since 1989 (Woolcock et al. 1989) and have been promoted in public education campaigns by the National Asthma Council Australia (NAC 2006).