

Queensland Medical Cooling Electricity Rebate Campaign Alliance

Campaign Platform

There is an urgent and vital need for the Queensland Government to implement a Medical Cooling Electricity Rebate to assist those on low incomes with a medical need to keep cool on hot days and nights.

With rapidly rising electricity costs it is increasingly difficult for them to afford the costs of keeping cool.

It is proposed that the minimum appropriate level of funding for Medical Cooling Rebate should be between \$250 and \$300 annually.

\$250 to \$300 is approximately one-third the annual costs that people on low incomes with MS in Queensland incur at home to keep cool as a result of their medical condition (there is no data available for other heat intolerant conditions).

Approximately 3,500 people would be eligible if eligibility is the same as the current Electricity Rebate, and access is extended to include those with low-income Health Care Cards. There should also be an additional requirement to have a doctor sign-off on the 'medical need' for cooling.

Heat Intolerance is major issue for most people with MS (90%), and also for some people with a wide range of other conditions including: lymphoedema, Parkinson's disease, fibromyalgia, post-polio syndrome, muscular dystrophy, poliomyelitis, chronic fatigue syndrome, lupus, scleroderma, cerebral palsy, spinal cord injury, and some people with acquired brain injuries.

Costs to Government would be relatively low in the first few years of the Rebate as uptake will increase gradually. With an initial uptake of 1500 people in 2010-2011 costs would be \$375-450,000, eventually levelling off at approximately \$1m by 2014 as uptake is maximised. These figures are based on indexation to an average CPI increase of 3% annually, although ideally the Rebate should be indexed to actual residential electricity prices to ensure its value does not erode over time.

Administratively the simplest approach would be to structure this rebate similarly to the existing Electricity Rebate – a flat annual rate. A percentage-based scheme would be more equitable however, and also support incentives for increased energy efficiency of air conditioners and homes.

Other states (VIC, WA and recently NSW) are already addressing the need for a Medical Cooling Rebate for people with heat intolerance on low incomes in recognition of the critical importance of their need to keep cool and the increasing difficulty they have in doing this in face of rapidly rising electricity costs.

We urge the Queensland Government to address this issue in the next State Budget for 2010-2011.

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Additional details can be found in the Discussion Paper for a Medical Cooling Electricity Rebate by the MS Society of Queensland (see www.msqld.org.au), and in the Keeping Cool Survey: Air Conditioner use by Australians with MS at: http://www.mssociety.org.au/live/documents/MSAustralia_KeepingCool_SurveyPolicy_ImplicationsReport_2009.pdf