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AirRater app helps Australia during bushfires

An award-winning [smartphone app](#) developed by the University of Tasmania's Menzies Institute for Medical Research played a major role in helping people across Australia who were exposed to smoke during the 2019-20 bushfires, a [recently published study](#) has found.

The free AirRater app helps people with asthma, hay fever and other lung conditions to better manage their symptoms and improve their quality of life. It works by gathering the user's symptoms and matching them with the environmental conditions at the time.

The app's users increased five-fold during the bushfires with people from every State and territory downloading it. Previously only funded to operate in Tasmania, the ACT and the Northern Territory, the AirRater team made the app available to all areas of Australia once the severity of the fires became apparent. This led to more than 40,000 additional app downloads across Australia.

Lead author on the paper, Sharon Campbell, said that AirRater users around Australia were surveyed after the bushfires to find out how they used the app.

Responses were received from 1,732 people, and they reported the app was highly useful and supported informed decision-making regarding daily activities.

"Smoke from the bushfires affected 80 per cent of the Australian population. We are very pleased that AirRater helped people to plan their outdoor activities, change their location to areas less affected by smoke, or stay inside when conditions were poor," Ms Campbell said.

By providing timely and location-specific air quality information, the app helped users to reduce their exposure to smoke and meant those people most vulnerable to the health impacts had support and information to stay well.

The Director of the Menzies Institute, Distinguished Professor Alison Venn, said these findings highlighted the way research could have direct and positive impacts on people's lives.

"The last bushfire season was the most severe on record in Australia. The success of the AirRater app in providing information on air quality in an innovative and easy-

to-use way shows how we can help protect the health of our community during times of emergency.”

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