



2025

EVENT REPORT

BREATHING TOGETHER FOR CHANGE A VISION FOR LUNG HEALTH POLICIES ACROSS LIFE-COURSE

European Health Forum Gastein





Breathing Together for change

The “Breathing Together for Change” session brought together a diverse panel of experts, patient representatives and policymakers to discuss the burden of respiratory diseases and explore strategies to improve lung health across Europe. Organised within the framework of the #KeepBreathing project and campaign, the session provided a platform for stakeholders to share knowledge, highlight patient experiences and identify opportunities for coordinated European action.

Speakers:



- **José Luis Castro:** Special Envoy for Chronic Respiratory Diseases, World Health Organization (WHO)
- **Thomas Allvin:** Executive Director for Strategy and Healthcare Systems, European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA)
- **Cornel Radu-Loghin:** Secretary General, the European Network for Smoking and Tobacco Prevention (ENSP)
- **Susanna Palkonen:** Director, European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients Associations (EFA)
- **Dr. Zsuzsanna Miklós:** Head of the Department of Translational Medicine, National Korányi Institute for Pulmonology, representative of EU Joint Action for Respiratory Diseases (JARED)
- **Frazer Goodwin** (Moderator): Policy Coordinator, European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients Associations (EFA)

The session featured two “fireside chats”. The first explored the burden of respiratory diseases in Europe, including the social, economic and commercial determinants, with a particular focus on youth and prevention. The second discussed policy tools to strengthen lung health, covering prevention, early diagnosis, treatment access and patient involvement in shaping care strategies.



Breathing Together for change

Key takeaways

- Recognition of the burden of respiratory diseases had led to the appointment of a WHO envoy on chronic respiratory diseases and adoption of a WHA resolution committing Member State to tackle the problem.
- Political will was still lacking to ensure the necessary rapid action, particularly in tobacco control and smoking.
- The duration patients faced without a clear accurate diagnosis continues to be underestimated.
- The discussion showcased how much appetite there is for greater action from both the industry and, EU Member States,
- The EU Joint Action on Respiratory Diseases (JARED) is a first step to cooperate and coordinate the response to chronic respiratory disease and pave the way for an eventual EU action plan dedicated to supporting Member States implementing the WHO resolution.





Unpacking European burden of respiratory diseases – state of play, determinants and youth

The first fireside chat of the session focused on the scope and impact of respiratory diseases across Europe, exploring both societal and individual consequences, as well as the commercial and environmental determinants of lung health.

José Luis Castro, WHO Envoy

Dr Castro, World Health Organisation Special Envoy for Chronic Respiratory Diseases, outlined his role as highlighting the need for more attention to Chronic respiratory disease, supporting Member States actions to attain the goals of the World Health Assembly resolution to prevent, diagnose and manage lung diseases like asthma, COPD, lung cancer and tuberculosis, as well as highlighting the need for action in international fora.



Susanna Palkonen, EFA



Susanna Palkonen, (EFA Director and ELHG representative) presented the impacts of respiratory disease from a patient perspective, highlighting that the burden of diseases extends beyond patients to partners, parents, children and families too. For example, in advanced stages of COPD, families are heavily impacted. The World Health Assembly resolution and comprehensive assessments in the WHO report “Chronic Respiratory Diseases and Health Equity by 2050” make progress easier to secure as well as providing a roadmap. Yet respiratory diseases have remained a secondary concern among non-communicable diseases and progress remains patchy, particularly for early diagnosis and implementation of strategic prevention policies.



Cornel Radu-Loghin, ENSP

Cornel Radu-Loghin focused on how tobacco control, critical to lung health, has been weakened by tobacco industry tactics and EU hesitancy to regulate the industry proactively and flexibly. The market for tobacco and smoking products had fundamentally changed over ten years, with the prevalence of vapes as a gateway introduction to tobacco, especially for the young. Yet agreement on updating minimum tobacco taxation rates, or a proposal revising the tobacco Products Directive was still overdue, underscoring the success of industry delay tactics.



Discussion with the audience

The discussion highlighted the pivotal role of patients in driving tobacco and smoke-free policies. When asked whether patient organisations should collaborate with one another and with other stakeholders to combat stigma and change societal attitudes towards lung disease, Susanna Palkonen described the new initiative, the European Respiratory Patient Advocacy Academy, as a starting point for coordinated action among European-level respiratory patient organisations. In response to questions about best practice in tobacco control, Cornel Radu-Loghin cited smoke-free pubs in Ireland and outdoor smoke-free policies as Belgium as examples.



The session also included a 'Slido poll', posed to participants both in the room and online, asking: "How long does it take on average to receive a diagnosis of asthma?" Most participants estimated two years, whereas research by EFA revealed the actual average is four and a half years, underlining the urgent need to accelerate diagnosis and improve patient pathways.



Use policy tools for improved lung health

The second fireside chat shifted the focus to the policy instruments, frameworks, and collaborations needed to strengthen lung health across Europe. Speakers explored opportunities for prevention, innovation, early diagnosis, equitable access to care, and the role of EU-level action in coordinating a long-term response.

Thomas Allvin, EFPIA



Thomas Allvin opened the discussion by reflecting on the role of industry in supporting prevention and strengthened health systems. He noted that the context today is very different from the COVID-19 pandemic, making mechanisms such as joint procurement less straightforward for Member States to apply. Nevertheless, he emphasised that EFPIA members are committed to contributing to improved lung health and would be willing to support calls for a dedicated EU strategy on lung health, particularly when such calls come from patient organisations and other health stakeholders.

Dr Zsuzsanna Miklós, JARED/National Korányi Institute



Dr Miklós outlined the scope and ambition of JARED, the first EU Joint Action funded under EU4Health that is dedicated exclusively to chronic respiratory diseases. Covering areas such as tobacco control, vaccination, early diagnosis, patient self-management, and data collection, JARED aims to strengthen national responses while paving the way for a more comprehensive European Lung Health Strategy. Crucially, she highlighted the central role of patient and stakeholder involvement in shaping JARED's deliverables. While funding for chronic respiratory diseases is still limited compared with other major NCDs, she stressed that JARED represents an important starting point.

More discussions

In the concluding discussion involving all panellists, José Luis Castro underscored the need to focus on prevention, highlighting how chronic respiratory diseases and respond to the challenge with the same urgency as the pandemic they are causing greater mortality than COVID did.

The Assistant to Andras Kulja MEP highlighted how terminology made diseases such as “COPD” or “NCDs” difficult in languages other than English, but there was also a need to communicate the benefits of a European Lung Health Plan to the members of the European Parliament.

Online participants’ questions on topics ranged from climate change, health literacy, to prevention and the WHA resolution on integrated lung health. Questions centred on how to communicate that prevention is cost-effective, how to ensure respiratory health is not overlooked within other EU initiatives (such as the Cancer Plan and the upcoming Cardiovascular Plan), and how concerned Europe should be about climate-driven increases in respiratory diseases.

Responding to this...

Jose Luis Castro highlighted that studies across multiple countries overwhelmingly show the benefits of action are real and outweigh the costs.



Susanna Palkonen outlined how both air pollution and climate events are impacting respiratory patients today – they are being told to stay at home or keep windows closed during pollution or extreme heat episodes already. She also underscored how much chronic respiratory diseases shared risk factors with both cancers and cardiovascular disease meaning that any actions on those risk factors under either EU cancer or cardiovascular overarching plans would benefit respiratory disease prevention too, if there is a real intension to do so.

Zsuzsanna Miklós underscored how important strengthening primary care was in responding to chronic respiratory diseases and something that had already been recognized in the JARED EU joint action.

Thomas Alvin outlined the vital prevention role that vaccination play, as well as the ongoing need for further research into additional tools to combat infectious diseases causing or exacerbating chronic respiratory diseases. Should there be a move towards a dedicated action on lung health at European level, EFPIA is on board.



LUNG TESTS

#KEEPPBREATHING

2 DAYS

130 PARTICIPANTS

EFA and the European Lung Health Group brought prevention directly to EHFG participants through a free spirometry booth, organised as part of the #KeepBreathing project. The booth was run by Gundula Koblmiller from Lungenunion (EFA's Austrian member) together with Sven Verschraegen from the University Hospital Ghent, ensuring high-quality testing and expert interpretation of results.

Spirometry is...

Spirometry is a simple, quick and painless test that measures how well the lungs work. It assesses both the volume and speed of airflow to detect early signs of conditions such as asthma and COPD, even before symptoms appear. For many participants, this was an opportunity to check their lung function for the first time.



EHFG participant



MEP Vytenis Andriukaitis



Sibila Quilici, Vaccines Europe





Towards better lung health in Europe

The ELHG session Breathing together for change: A vision for lung health policies across the life-course made one message unmistakably clear: Europe cannot afford to overlook lung health any longer.

The discussions revealed a striking consensus across patients, clinicians, policymakers and public health experts that respiratory diseases remain under-detected, under-prioritised and insufficiently addressed in EU health strategies, despite being among the leading causes of chronic illness and early death.

Policy insights

Key insights from the session underscored the depth of the challenge. Delays in diagnosis highlight the urgent need to strengthen primary care, improve screening pathways and increase public awareness. Speakers also emphasised that prevention must be non-negotiable. Tobacco, vaping and air pollution were repeatedly identified as areas where Europe has the tools to act, but lacks the political will for consistent, collective implementation.



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Together, we must ensure that every person in Europe has the chance to #KeepBreathing and live well.

The spirometry booth demonstrated how simple prevention measures can engage people directly and meaningfully. With 130 lung function tests delivered in just two days, the activity illustrated not only the appetite for accessible health checks but also the potential of early detection to change the trajectory of respiratory disease.

The session showed that improving lung health requires a sustained, integrated and European-wide approach, one grounded in prevention, early diagnosis, equitable access to care, research investment and strong patient involvement. The #KeepBreathing project and the European Lung Health Group will continue working together to champion these priorities and to ensure that lung health becomes a permanent, prominent and protected pillar of EU health policy.



Background

On 1 October 2025, the European Lung Health Group (ELHG), in the framework of the #KeepBreathing project, hosted the session “Breathing Together for Change: Lung health policy through the life course” at the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG) in Bad Hofgastein, Austria. Organised by the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients’ Associations (EFA) on behalf of ELHG, the session united leading experts, policymakers and patient organisations from across sectors to shape the future of lung-health policy in Europe.

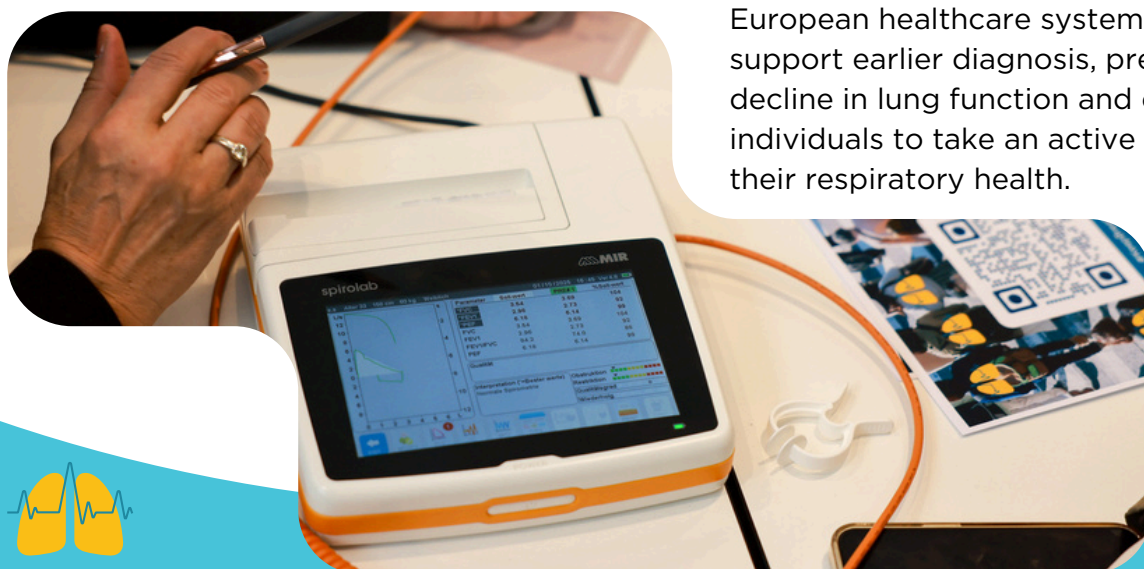
The session arrived at a pivotal moment. In May 2025, the World Health Organisation (WHO) adopted the Resolution on Integrated Lung Health, elevating chronic respiratory diseases onto the global health agenda. The ELHG event leveraged this momentum to spotlight lung health across the life course, from prevention and early diagnosis to treatment and self-management, and to press for a coordinated European policy response.

With more than 1,500 participants from across Europe, the EHFG provided a unique platform to broaden awareness of respiratory diseases, which affect tens of millions of Europeans and impose heavy economic, social and health burdens. Through two engaging “fireside chats”, interactive polling and on-site spirometry testing, the session not only underscored the urgency of the challenge but also demonstrated tangible steps for action.

The goal

To bring patient experiences into the policy conversation, to highlight the need for multidisciplinary, life-course care and to advocate for stronger EU-wide strategies that support early detection, equitable access to treatment, prevention efforts and improved quality of life for people with lung diseases.

To complement the policy discussions, ELHG offered two days of free spirometry testing on-site. Over 25% of the onsite participants tested their lung function, highlighting the importance of early detection and practical engagement. This hands-on initiative illustrated how mainstreaming spirometry within European healthcare systems can support earlier diagnosis, prevent decline in lung function and empower individuals to take an active role in their respiratory health.





The European Lung Health Group and the #KeepBreathing project

9

European-level patient and healthcare professional organisations

179

member associations

34

countries

ELHG brings together expertise to empower patients with lung diseases, improve early diagnosis, optimise multidisciplinary care, advance research and enhance quality of life. Building on this coalition, ELHG launched the Breathe Vision for 2030, a flagship initiative designed to advance respiratory health across Europe. Breathe Vision seeks to influence European and EU policy priorities to maximise benefits for respiratory health, promote greater understanding of respiratory diseases in society, support research and improvements in care and address the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on lung health. Through Breathe Vision, ELHG coordinates European-level advocacy and engagement with policymakers, healthcare professionals and patient communities. The initiative provides the framework for campaigns, projects, and collaborations, including work with the MEP Lung Health Group and the #KeepBreathing campaign.

The #KeepBreathing campaign is an actionable arm of Breathe Vision. Launched by ELHG, it focuses on promoting prevention, early diagnosis, equitable access to care and patient-centred approaches across the life course. By uniting patient organisations, healthcare professionals, and policymakers, #KeepBreathing raises awareness of the burden of respiratory diseases, influences EU decision-making, and supports the development of a coordinated, long-term European strategy and plan for lung health.





Thank you

This session was made possible through the shared commitment of the European Lung Health Group (ELHG) and the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA) and was proudly organised within the framework of the #KeepBreathing project.

We extend our sincere thanks to all speakers, panellists and moderators for their thoughtful contributions and for bringing expertise, vision and urgency to the discussion. Their insights were essential in shaping a meaningful dialogue on the future of lung health in Europe.

Our gratitude also goes to the European Health Forum Gastein for providing a platform where respiratory health could be discussed openly and strategically, and to the many participants both in person and online who enriched the session with their questions, reflections and engagement.

A special thank you is owed to Gundula Koblmiller (Lungenunion) and Sven Verschraegen (University Hospital Ghent) for running the spirometry booth with professionalism and dedication, offering participants a tangible reminder of the importance of early detection and prevention.

Finally, we acknowledge the tireless work of all ELHG members, patient advocates, healthcare professionals and partners who continue to champion better lung health across Europe. Their collaboration and commitment remain the driving force behind the #KeepBreathing campaign and the broader Breathe Vision for 2030.

Acknowledgements

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