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Position Paper

The adoption of the World Health Assembly resolution on an integrated lung health approach one year on: evidence for European level action

A Position Paper by the European Lung Health Group

Executive Summary

In 2025, the World Health Assembly (WHA) adopted a landmark resolution on an integrated approach to lung health, recognising for the first time the need for countries to take a coordinated approach to lung health, covering prevention, early diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, and long-term care, while addressing inequalities and strengthening health systems. The adoption of the resolution marked a critical step in elevating lung health on the global political agenda¹. The ELHG welcomed this global commitment and called for swift EU and national level action to follow.

One year on, progress in Europe remains slow, and implementation of the resolution's targets is still in its early stages. Yet, lung diseases continue to grow and represent a major burden across Europe, affecting millions of people and placing significant strain on healthcare systems and economies.

The European Lung Health Group (ELHG)², 9 European level patients and healthcare professionals' organisations gathering 179 member associations across 34 European countries, welcomes the progress made so far in addressing lung health at a global level, but also stress that the momentum generated by the resolution must now be translated into concrete, coordinated action at EU level.

We call on the European Union to develop a European Lung Health Plan, ensuring that lung health is addressed comprehensively from prevention, early detection, care, research, and environmental perspectives that can enable EU Member States to better action, share and comply with their commitments made at the WHA.

Introduction

At the 78th World Health Assembly in May 2025, World Health Organization (WHO) Member States adopted the milestone resolution 'Promoting and prioritizing an integrated lung health



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approach', committing to coordinated national action to tackle the growing burden of respiratory diseases. The resolution was supported by countries worldwide, demonstrating the increased global interest in addressing the urgency of respiratory diseases.

The resolution came at a critical moment. In Europe over 350,000 people die every year due to respiratory diseases³. The WHA resolution calls on governments to adopt an integrated approach to lung health, and covers both chronic, common and rare, and infectious respiratory diseases, which are also represented by the ELHG, especially asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), lung cancer, tuberculosis, pulmonary hypertension, pulmonary fibrosis and cystic fibrosis.

One year on: progress and gaps

In the year following the adoption of the resolution, there have been encouraging signs of increased awareness and engagement around lung health. Lung health has gained greater visibility within policy discussions, and patient organisations, clinicians, and other stakeholders have strengthened their advocacy efforts, and elected EU policy makers have spoken up. Some Member States have begun to explore initiatives that reflect elements of an integrated approach to respiratory health.

However, these developments remain fragmented and insufficient. There is still no coherent framework at European level to guide action on lung health, and significant disparities persist in prevention, diagnosis, and care. Patients in different parts of Europe continue to experience markedly different outcomes depending on where they live, reflecting variations in health system capacity, access to services, and policy prioritisation.

In addition, lung health remains dispersed and invisible across multiple policy domains, including health, environment, research, and employment, with limited coordination between them, or ambition for lung and respiratory health. This undermines the effectiveness of interventions and prevents the development of a comprehensive and sustained response with tangible outcomes for patients, healthcare systems and societies. Without a clear structure for implementation, the momentum generated by the resolution risks losing impact.

To mark the first anniversary of the resolution, the ELHG launched a video to explain what the resolution contains and how patients, their organisations and advocates can use it as an advocacy tool at national and local level⁴. For patients and patient organisations, this is not just a global agreement. It is a reference point for action. It sets out targets which governments have committed to deliver and provides a basis to assess national progress, identify gaps in care, and engage decision-makers.





The video translates these commitments into practical guidance for advocacy at national level. It shows how the resolution can be used to ask clear questions on access to diagnosis, availability of treatment, prevention programmes, and follow-up care.

Building evidence for a European Lung Health Plan

The resolution is a strong starting point at global level. As a next step, the ELHG is calling for European policymakers to take a similar approach and to commit to specific targets. The ELHG calls for a European Lung Health Plan to support coordinated action across countries and ensure that lung health is addressed as a priority within EU policy.

There is a compelling need for stronger action at European level. The determinants of lung health are inherently cross-border in nature, particularly in relation to air quality, climate change, and the spread of infectious diseases or nicotine products commerce, and the challenges on diagnosing early and correctly lung diseases are shared. Addressing these challenges effectively requires coordinated policy responses that go beyond borders.

At the same time, significant inequalities across and between Member States continue to affect access to prevention, early diagnosis, and treatment. These disparities are inconsistent with the objectives of the European Health Union and highlight the need for greater alignment and cooperation. An EU-level framework can play a crucial role in supporting convergence and ensuring that all citizens benefit from advances in care and innovation.

Lung health is also closely aligned with several major EU policy priorities. The Joint Action on respiratory diseases (JARED), is a first step for a coordinated effort on lung health. Efforts to prevent and treat lung cancer have already been enshrined in legislation in the implementation of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan. The EU Healthier together – non-communicable disease (NCD) initiative and, more recently, in the EU Safe Hearts Plan address NCDs closely linked to lung health and address key points which also apply to it, from screening to earlier diagnosis. However, to be addressed fully, lung health needs to have its own standalone, overarching plan.

In addition to the public health imperative, there is a strong economic rationale for action. Lung diseases are associated with high healthcare costs and significant productivity losses. Investing in prevention and early intervention can reduce long-term expenditure while improving quality of life and economic participation. Strengthening respiratory health also enhances preparedness for future health crises, as demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations for a European Lung Health Plan

In February 2026, the ELHG organised a High-level Forum on Lung Health, inviting expert speakers to share their insights on what should be in a future European Lung Health Plan⁵. These recommendations are summarised below, focusing on our key priority areas of access, prevention and investment.





1. Access

Ensuring equitable and timely access to prevention, diagnosis and treatment must be a central pillar of any future European Lung Health Plan. Respiratory diseases affect more than 80 million people across Europe⁶, yet access to care remains fragmented and unequal. Barriers exist along the entire care pathway, from delayed diagnosis in primary care to limited access to specialist services, essential diagnostics and innovative treatments. Health inequalities are particularly pronounced, as individuals from lower socioeconomic groups are more likely to be exposed to major risk factors such as tobacco smoke, air pollution and poor housing conditions, while simultaneously facing poorer access to healthcare services and worse outcomes.

Disparities in access to medicines persist as well, with significant variation in the availability and uptake of treatments between Member States. Addressing these inequities requires both improved access to existing medicines and faster uptake of innovation. A European Lung Health Plan should therefore strengthen the regulatory and policy framework, to ensure that Europe a region where scientific advances translate rapidly into patient benefit. All patients, regardless of where they live, need to access the right treatment at the right time.

2. Prevention

Prevention must be recognised as a cost-effective and impactful lever for reducing the burden of respiratory disease. Chronic respiratory diseases remain among the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in Europe, with COPD accounting for nearly 80% of respiratory-related deaths⁷. Many of these conditions are preventable or can be mitigated through stronger action on well-established risk factors, including tobacco use, poor air quality and occupational exposures. Despite progress in recent years, these drivers continue to impose a significant health burden, underscoring the need for more ambitious and better coordinated policies.

Primary care plays a critical role in prevention, early detection and disease management, yet it remains under-resourced in many health systems. Health systems must invest in strengthening primary care capacity, including workforce training, access to diagnostics and appropriate reimbursement models that reflect the complexity and time required to manage chronic respiratory diseases effectively.

3. Investment

The annual societal cost of 9 major lung conditions is €1.4 trillion in Europe⁸, driven by direct healthcare costs as well as productivity losses and premature mortality. However, this burden is not matched by corresponding levels of investment in research, prevention or care. A European Lung Health Plan must therefore ensure that funding is aligned with need, recognising lung health as both a public health priority and a key component of economic resilience.





Increased investment in research and innovation is essential to support earlier intervention and improve long-term outcomes. Investment in health systems is required to expand diagnostic capacity, strengthen integrated care pathways and improve data collection and monitoring, ensuring that patients receive coordinated and high-quality care throughout the disease continuum.

A strong focus on prevention and system resilience is also essential. Investments in vaccination programmes, air quality improvement and tobacco control deliver significant long-term returns by reducing disease incidence and alleviating pressure on health systems.

Conclusion

The ELHG welcomed the WHA resolution as a significant first step. One year on, we will be expecting greater implementation by Member States, supported by decisive action at the European level. Europe is facing a growing respiratory health crisis, yet the policy response remains fragmented and insufficient. A dedicated European Lung Health Plan is needed to close gaps in access, strengthen prevention and align investment with the scale of the challenge. By doing so, it can deliver meaningful improvements in health outcomes, reduce inequalities and build more resilient health systems for the future.

¹ European Lung Health Group - World Health Assembly commits to promoting and prioritising lung

health at national level: https://breathevision.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Press_release_WHA_Lung_Health_Resolution.pdf

² European Lung Health Group - <https://breathevision.eu/about/#who-we-are>

³ European Commission – Respiratory Diseases Statistics - https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Respiratory_diseases_statistics

⁴ European Lung Health Group- The World Health Assembly lung health resolution: a patient explainer [The World Health Assembly lung health resolution: a patient explainer](#)

⁵ European Lung Health Group – Towards a European Lung Health Plan: new report from the High-level Forum on Lung Health: <https://breathevision.eu/news/towards-a-european-lung-health-plan-new-report-from-the-high-level-forum-on-lung-health/>

⁶ Chronic respiratory diseases: more than 80 million affected and many more undiagnosed, warns new WHO and European Respiratory Society report <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/12-06-2025-chronic-respiratory-diseases--more-than-80-million-affected-and-many-more-undiagnosed--warns-new-who-and-european-respiratory-society-report>

⁷ World Health Organisation (WHO) - New report on chronic respiratory diseases in the WHO European Region - <https://www.knowledge-action-portal.com/en/content/new-report-chronic-respiratory-diseases-who-european-region>

⁸ International Respiratory Coalition (IRC) - <https://international-respiratory-coalition.org/countries/europe/>

