

COPD is still less likely than heart disease or lung cancer to be viewed as a leading cause of death

New Global Survey Shows Policymakers Increasingly Recognise COPD's Burden — Now Urgent Action is Needed

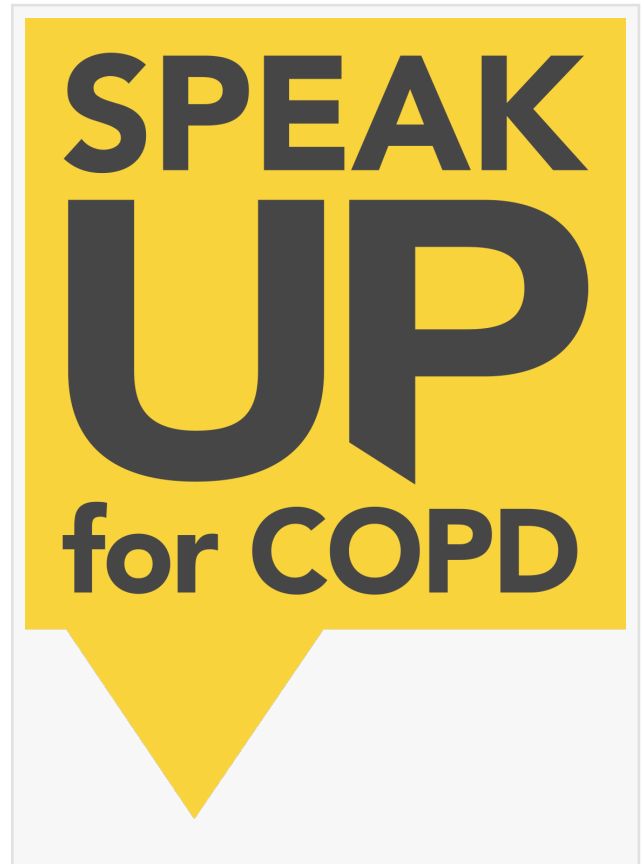
VIENNA, AUSTRIA, September 26, 2025
/EINPresswire.com/ -- New Global Survey Shows Policymakers Increasingly Recognise [COPD's](#) Burden — Now Urgent Action is Needed

Ipsos 2025 findings reveal progress compared to 2022, but highlight ongoing gaps in awareness, prioritisation, and care¹

The [Speak Up for COPD](#) Coalition today released new global survey data from Ipsos revealing a welcome rise in policymakers' understanding of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and its toll on patients, communities, and health systems. Yet leaders across health and policy warn that political prioritisation still lags far behind other major chronic illnesses — leaving millions at risk.

COPD is the third leading cause of death worldwide (excluding COVID-19), responsible for 3.5 million deaths in 2021². There are 391 million people are living with the disease today³, a figure projected to climb to nearly 600 million by 2050⁴. European data suggest COPD costs health systems up to €10,000 per person every year;¹⁸ between 45% and 70% of these costs may be attributable to managing flare-ups.¹⁹ These costs could be reduced if health systems moved from reactive to proactive strategies, with all people receiving earlier diagnosis and guideline recommended treatment⁵.

"It's time to raise COPD on the political agenda. We must ensure early interventions, address stigma, and invest where the burden is greatest."



– Jose Luis Castro, Director-General Special Envoy for Chronic Respiratory Diseases, World Health Organization (WHO)

Awareness Rising – But Priority Still Low

The Ipsos 2025 survey, conducted among health policymakers and influencers in Asia-Pacific, the Americas, and Europe, shows encouraging gains since 2022. In 2022, in the wake of COVID, just 5% of policymakers named COPD as their top health policy priority; by 2025, that has more than doubled to 11%, with 27% including it in their top three priorities.

Awareness of COPD among policymakers has risen from 37% in 2022 to 59% in 2025, and more than three-quarters (76%) now recognise the disease as a serious burden on health systems. Policymakers increasingly see COPD as a driver of hospital admissions: 41% now rank it among the top three causes of hospital admissions in their country behind only heart disease and stroke – a sharp rise from 8% in 2022.

“COPD is a leading cause of morbidity and mortality globally; yet, it is less likely than heart disease or lung cancer to be viewed as a leading cause of death. In a 2025 landmark resolution, the WHO and the UN prioritized lung health, a critical step forward for patients, but it’s policymakers around the world that have the power to shift the trajectory of COPD with more funding and hard-hitting policy to drive better education, research and access to diagnosis, treatment and long-term care.”

– Tonya Winders, CEO for Global Allergy & Airways Patient Platform ([GAAPP](#)) and Chair of Speak Up for COPD coalition

Stigma Still Blocks Progress

Despite growing recognition, policymakers say stigma remains a major barrier. COPD is still often perceived solely as a smoker’s disease, limiting public sympathy and investment. In fact, 25–45% of people with COPD have never smoked⁷. Furthermore, up to 23% of all COPD deaths in low- and middle-income countries are associated with household air pollution.⁸ Women in lower-income countries are at particular risk of developing COPD due to exposure to biomass smoke during cooking.⁹ While 98% of policymakers acknowledge smoking as a key risk factor, the majority also now recognise indoor (92%) and outdoor (94%) air pollution and workplace exposure to dust and fumes (98%) as significant contributors. Yet fewer policymakers appreciate links to climate change (49%), comorbidities such as diabetes (37%) and stroke (36%), or genetic factors (58%).

“COPD is a thief. It steals your breath, your ability to move, and your ability to live. But you can fight back — with determination and the right support,” said Carolee Egan, a patient living with COPD.

Shifting Awareness to Action

The survey reveals strong policy support for prevention and early care: 56% of policymakers ranked early detection and diagnosis as the top measure to prevent COPD, followed by tackling

risk factors (49%) and improving integrated, proactive primary and secondary care optimised to guidelines (31%). However, with many health issues on the agenda, 51% of policymakers admitted they are unfamiliar with international COPD guidelines, and 44% with global best practices.

More than three-quarters (79%) of policymakers say they are likely to advocate for COPD as a policy priority — but call for greater awareness of issues associated with ageing populations, the need for more evidence-based patient advocacy, and better economic impact modelling.

The cost of inaction is steep with the global COPD burden expected to rise to \$4.3 trillion between 2020 and 2050 without investment in effective interventions⁶. World leaders are taking the initiative to drive appropriate and much needed increases in attention and funding. At the UN High-Level Meeting on Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs) in September, the agenda focused on greater political prioritisation, improved access to diagnosis and care, enhanced investment in innovation and a clear roadmap for the future of COPD within the global health agenda. Speak Up for COPD chair Tonya Winders, CEO for Global Allergy & Airways Patient Platform (GAAPP) and Jose Luis Castro, Director-General Special Envoy for Chronic Respiratory Diseases, WHO participated in the UN panel discussion, entitled “Elevating Chronic Respiratory Diseases on the NCD Agenda: Political Solutions for a Breathable Future”.

“Speak Up for COPD calls on governments, healthcare systems, and patient communities to break the cycle of underdiagnosis and underfunding that persists, even as awareness improves,” said Winders. “Speak Up for COPD exists to empower policymakers with evidence, strategies, and partnerships. The prioritisation by the World Health Organization and the United Nations is a critical turning point, but more work is needed. Let’s act now—so millions can breathe easier.”

About Speak Up for COPD

Speak Up for COPD is a global coalition dedicated to raising COPD awareness, combating stigma, and mobilising action—amplifying the voices of those affected and driving policy change worldwide.

Speak Up for COPD is supported by a coalition of partners across the non-profit sector and pharmaceutical industry to establish COPD as a public health priority. The Speak Up for COPD coalition includes the Global Allergy & Airways Patient Platform, International Federation of Ageing, COPD Foundation, International Coalition of Respiratory Nurses, International Pharmaceutical Federation, with funding from AstraZeneca, Roche, Sanofi, Regeneron, and GSK.

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