Speak Up for COPD Calls for Urgent Government Action on the Global Diagnosis and Care Gap

Landmark Joint Declaration launches against a backdrop of 480 million people affected by COPD and persistent gaps in diagnosis, treatment, care and prevention

BARCELONA, SPAIN, September 4, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Today, the Speak Up for COPD coalition, a global initiative uniting patient advocates, industry and the non-profit sector in elevating COPD as a policy priority, launches a new Joint Declaration calling on governments to take measurable action to improve outcomes for people living with and at risk of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

COPD is a progressive and debilitating lung disease characterised by persistent breathlessness, chronic cough and fatigue.1 Setting out a shared vision for change, the Joint Declaration identifies priorities to support early and accurate diagnosis, equitable access to guideline-recommended treatment and more integrated and continuous COPD management, alongside stronger action on prevention and risk reduction.

The need for action is increasingly urgent. Over 70% of people living with COPD remain undiagnosed, with inequitable access to effective treatment and care.2 Globally, COPD affects 480 million people, is the third leading cause of death worldwide and is projected to cost the global economy $4.3 trillion between 2020 and 2050.3,4,5 Yet only 27% of policymakers consider COPD as a top three healthcare policy priority.6

To reduce the human, healthcare and economic burden of COPD worldwide, the Joint Declaration calls for greater political commitment to address persistent gaps in COPD care, focused on four key areas:

- Prioritise early and accurate diagnosis of COPD by investing in diagnostic capacity in the community and primary care setting and expanding access to evidence-based diagnostic tools.
- Ensure equitable access to guideline-recommended treatment, supported by health system quality measures, to improve COPD patient outcomes across all care settings.
- Embed integrated COPD management and continuity of care, including structured patient review, self-management support and multidisciplinary approaches, as standard clinical practice

with measurable indicators.
 Prioritise COPD prevention and reduce risk by strengthening vaccination programmes, reducing exposure to air pollution and occupational risks, addressing wider social determinants of health and investing sustainably in prevention for vulnerable populations.

Without meaningful intervention, COPD prevalence could rise to nearly 600 million cases worldwide by 2050.3 This growing burden, however, will not be felt equally. People in the lowest socioeconomic groups are at least twice as likely to experience poor COPD outcomes, including hospitalisation and death, with women in lower-income settings facing additional risks from household air pollution caused by biomass smoke used for cooking.7,8 Meanwhile rural, remote and island communities face some of the greatest barriers to diagnosis, treatment and care.9

Ricardo Baptista Leite, Founder and President of the UNITE Parliamentarians Network for Global Health, said: “The global burden of COPD reflects both unequal exposure to risk and unequal access to care. The disease is shaped by a wide range of factors, including tobacco and nicotine use, second-hand smoke, air pollution, occupational exposure to dust and chemicals, biomass fuel, genetic factors and climate change.

“Many of these risks cross borders, while gaps in diagnosis, treatment and care persist across all settings. This is a global public health challenge that requires a coordinated and sustained policy response.

“The Joint Declaration provides governments with a framework for action across diagnosis, treatment, integrated disease management and prevention. International commitments on lung health have established the direction. Parliamentarians have a pivotal role ensuring that governments translate those commitments into funded national strategies, measurable targets and stronger health systems that deliver for people living with and at risk of COPD.”

Gaps in timely diagnosis, treatment and integrated care can have significant consequences. People living with COPD face exacerbations, sudden flare ups that can be debilitating and often result in hospitalisation.2 Even a single COPD exacerbation increases the risk of future exacerbations and mortality, while people who are diagnosed late have a 46% higher risk of first exacerbation compared with those diagnosed early.10,11 Improving outcomes requires earlier intervention and consistent access to treatment rather than responding only at the point of crisis, priorities that are reflected in the Joint Declaration.2

Tonya Winders, President and CEO of the Global Allergy & Airways Patient Platform, said: “For too many people living with COPD, the system still intervenes too late. The consequences can be serious, but there is also a real opportunity to change that trajectory.

“With early diagnosis, appropriate treatment and the right ongoing support, people living with COPD can be better supported to manage their condition, remain active and independent for longer and reduce the risk of preventable deterioration.

“The Joint Declaration gives governments a practical framework for making that progress possible, with action across diagnosis, treatment, integrated care and prevention. What is needed now is the political commitment, investment and accountability to turn those recommendations into meaningful improvements in people’s lives.

“COPD remains under-prioritised, underdiagnosed and too often stigmatised, but we know where change is needed. By acting earlier and more consistently, we can improve outcomes for people living with COPD and reduce avoidable pressure on health systems.”

In addition to exacerbations and hospitalisations, COPD can affect many aspects of daily life. The condition can make it harder to work and manage everyday activities, reducing quality of life.12 Among those diagnosed, around 80% experience daily symptoms, including breathlessness and fatigue, with significant impact on people, families and communities.1 People living with COPD may also face mental health and emotional wellbeing challenges.1

Pamela, a 30-year-old mother of three living with COPD in Togo, said: “My respiratory problems began in 2013 and became so severe that I had to leave school and was hospitalised several times. I was initially treated for asthma, but the treatment did not help. It was only years later, after my husband pushed for further answers, that I was diagnosed with COPD.

“The condition has affected many parts of my life, including my pregnancies and my ability to carry out activities that require physical effort. It also placed a significant financial burden on my parents, and being known as ‘the sick one’ was very difficult for me.

“Through SM-VM, I discovered GAAPP and learned more about how to prevent and manage my attacks. I would not want anyone else to go through what I have experienced. I hope decision-makers and the public understand that COPD affects much more than breathing. It can affect education, family life, finances, work and dignity. People need earlier diagnosis, appropriate treatment, support and understanding.”

Alongside early and accurate diagnosis, the Joint Declaration highlights the importance of integrated COPD management, continuity of care and self-management support.

Peter, who lives in the UK with COPD, said: “Seventeen years ago, while on holiday in France, I began experiencing breathing problems. When I returned to the UK, I was initially diagnosed with asthma. Two months later, after a follow-up appointment and an X-ray, I was diagnosed with COPD.

“Living with COPD, it is very important to remain physically active, and pulmonary rehabilitation can be an important part of this. In my experience, there can be very little support during the earlier stages of COPD.

“For me, understanding my condition has been essential, including recognising when I may be experiencing an exacerbation and knowing what action to take. Self-management is only possible if important information about COPD is widely accessible to patients. That information should be available to everyone living with COPD, wherever they are.”

The Joint Declaration was developed through contributions from members of the Speak Up for COPD coalition, including the Global Allergy & Airways Patient Platform, the International Federation on Ageing, the COPD Foundation, the International Coalition of Respiratory Nurses and the International Pharmaceutical Federation, together with funders AstraZeneca, GSK, Roche, Sanofi and Regeneron. All partners contribute time and expertise to the coalition activities.

The coalition is calling on individuals and organisations to add their names to the Joint Declaration and join the global movement for stronger action on COPD.

The Time to Act: Joint Declaration on the Urgent Need for Coordinated Action on Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease is being formally launched alongside the new Speak Up for COPD website, where it will be available to read and support.

Read and sign the Joint Declaration here.

Further information about Speak Up for COPD is available on the website.

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Notes to editors

About COPD
COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) is a debilitating and progressive lung disease.1 COPD is characterised by persistent breathlessness, chronic cough and fatigue. It often develops gradually and may go unnoticed until lung function has significantly declined.1,4 People living with COPD also experience flare-ups (often called exacerbations): sudden, severe episodes that can be debilitating, frequently require hospitalisation and can further decrease lung function with each occurrence.4 COPD risk factors span individual behaviours, environmental exposures and systemic determinants.4 Risk factors include tobacco and nicotine use, second-hand smoke, air pollution, occupational exposure to dust and chemicals, biomass fuel and genetic factors. Climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, which heighten exposure to several of these risks.4

About the Time to Act: Joint Declaration on the Urgent Need for Coordinated Action on Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)
The Joint Declaration invites organisations and individuals to join a global movement calling for stronger action on COPD. It calls for timely and accurate diagnosis, equitable access to guideline-

recommended treatment, integrated disease management and continuity of care, alongside greater investment in prevention and measures to reduce COPD risk. All Speak Up for COPD coalition partners contributed to the development of the Joint Declaration.

About Speak Up for COPD

Speak Up for COPD is supported by a coalition of partners from the non-profit sector and pharmaceutical industry working to establish COPD as a global public health priority. Coalition partners include the Global Allergy & Airways Patient Platform, the International Federation on Ageing, the COPD Foundation, the International Coalition of Respiratory Nurses and the International Pharmaceutical Federation. Funding is provided by AstraZeneca, GSK, Roche, Sanofi and Regeneron. All partners contribute time and expertise to the coalition activities.

Media contacts

Sarah Carter
sarah.carter@mdcommsgroup.com

Riley Sanders
rsanders@gaapp.org

Tonya Winders
twinders@gaapp.org

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Sarah Carter
MD Comms Group
sarah.carter@mdcommsgroup.com

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