



Increasing access to inhaled medicines for COPD and asthma

STATEMENT

Multistakeholder Hearing on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases (NCD) and the Promotion of Mental Health and Well-being

2 May 2025

United Nations, New York City

Madam Chair, Excellencies, and distinguished delegates.

My name is Professor David Halpin and I am speaking on behalf of the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS), a global body representing leading international professional respiratory societies from every region of the world.

We align with the NCD Alliance Call to Lead.

Chronic lung diseases, particularly COPD and asthma, are the third commonest cause of death worldwide.

In 2021, 4 million people died from these conditions.

For the 650 million children and adults who are living with COPD or asthma, daily life is a constant struggle, and for countries, the health and economic costs are high and rising.

COPD and asthma prevalence is forecast to more than double by 2050.

Whilst acknowledging the importance of reducing exposure to risk factors to reduce this burden, there is an urgent need to increase access to quality and effective inhaled medicines that are affordable to patients currently suffering from these diseases.

The significant gaps in access to affordable inhaled medicines for COPD and asthma are well documented and access is far below the 80% WHO Global NCD Action Plan target.

The latest WHO NCD Country Capacity Survey highlighted the wide disparities in inhaler access between income groups, with inhalers available in only 26% of low-income countries compared to 93% of high-income countries.

(1) FIRS members include American College Chest Physicians, American Thoracic Society, Asian Pacific Society of Respiriology, Asociación Latino Americana De Tórax, European Respiratory Society, International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, Global Initiative for Asthma, Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease, and Pan African Thoracic Society.



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Where inhaled medicines are available, patients in low-income countries can be asked to pay one month's wages for one week's supply.

Many of these patients literally cannot speak for themselves and we must act on their behalf.

FIRS is calling for action to increase access to quality, effective inhaled medicines that are affordable for people living with COPD and asthma.

Specifically for governments, industry, and global health agencies to collaborate on activities to close the wide access gaps in the countries with the heaviest burdens of COPD and asthma.

We are hopeful that Member States will use the UN High-level NCD Meeting in September to recognize the importance of chronic respiratory diseases, to commit to embedding measures in their national health plans to overcome the inequalities in access to the effective inhaled medicines that already exist, and to include specific language in the Political Declaration addressing these issues.

This is the year to turn the corner on NCD prevention, diagnosis, and treatment and we must ensure patients with chronic lung disease are not overlooked and left behind. Thank you for this opportunity to contribute.

Delivered by Professor David Halpin, Fellow, Royal College Physicians, Member, British Thoracic Society (BTS), European Respiratory Society (ERS), American Thoracic Society (ATS), International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union), Member of Board of Directors of Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD), Professor, University of Exeter, United Kingdom, on behalf of the FIRS Working Group on Increasing Access to Affordable Inhaled Medicines for COPD and Asthma.



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DRAFT LANGUAGE

Political Declaration

Fourth High-level Meeting on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs) and the Promotion of Mental Health and Well-being

UN General Assembly

September 2025

We, Heads of State and Government and representatives of States and Governments, assembled at the United Nations...

Acknowledge the wide gaps in access to quality and effective inhaled medicines for children and adults with COPD or asthma that are affordable to patients in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), despite the high burden of these chronic lung diseases. (1)

We therefore commit to scale up our efforts and further implement the following actions:

Increase access to quality and effective inhaled medicines for the management of COPD and asthma that are affordable to patients, taking special measures to reduce the wide gaps in access to appropriate inhaled bronchodilators, corticosteroids, and combinations of these in LMICs. These measures will accelerate both the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 3.4 and 3.8, as well as the NCD Action Plan target of 80% availability of affordable essential medicines to treat major NCDs, in the public and private sector.

(1) Stolbrink M, Ozoh OB, Halpin DMG, Chronic Respiratory Diseases Medicines Survey Investigators Collaboration, et al. Availability, cost and affordability of essential medicines for chronic respiratory diseases in low-income and middle-income countries: a cross-sectional study. Thorax, 2024.