



# An historic opportunity for the 650 million children and adults living with chronic respiratory diseases

## STATEMENT

in preparation for

**Fourth High-level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of NCDs and the Promotion of Mental Health and Wellbeing**

**22 September 2025**

The **Forum of International Respiratory Societies** (FIRS), which includes the world's leading international professional respiratory societies (1), calls on UN Member States to recognize that urgent action is needed to increase access to inhaled medicines for chronic respiratory diseases in the Political Declaration that will be released after the **High-level NCD Meeting** in New York on Thursday.

One of the most glaring inequities in access to NCD medicines is the wide gap in access to affordable inhaled medicines for the 650 million children and adults living with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and asthma.

More than two-thirds of pharmacies and hospitals in low- and middle-income countries (LMICS) do not stock inhaled medicines, and where they are available a month's supply can cost a week's wages.

Each year **more than 4 million** adults and children die from chronic respiratory diseases making it the third highest cause of death globally. Lack of access to inhaled medicines is contributing to a massive and rising burden of death and disability and economic costs due to lost school and work days and frequent hospital visits. The global economic burden from COPD alone is estimated to grow to **\$US40 trillion** by 2050.

FIRS launched a campaign, **Increasing Access to Inhaled Medicines for COPD and Asthma**, on World Asthma Day in May 2025, calling on governments, industry, global health agencies, and donors to invest greater resources to increase access to inhaled medicines for COPD and asthma by addressing five priority areas.

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(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 (The Union), Global Initiative for Asthma, Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease, and Pan African Thoracic Society.

- 1 **Policy:** Inclusion of the latest evidence-based inhalers in all global and national COPD and asthma treatment guidelines, essential medicine lists, and UHC reimbursement lists
- 2 **Product:** Improved availability of inhaled medicines by facilitating registration, technology transfer, voluntary licensing agreements, and other programs
- 3 **Price:** Reductions in inhaler prices from bulk purchasing, pooled procurement, tiered/differential pricing, generic alternatives, and other proven strategies
- 4 **Primary Care:** Increased training to diagnose and manage COPD and asthma, including improved access to spirometry and peak flow measurement tools
- 5 **Patient Advocacy:** Investments in campaigns to increase community awareness of COPD and asthma, and to destigmatize and improve the correct use of inhalers

Government leaders attending the UN High-level NCD Meeting have an unprecedented opportunity to respond to this call by including language in their Political Declaration that provides a strong foundation for action by Member States and their partners to increase access to affordable inhaled medicines.

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This Statement was developed by the FIRS Working Group on Increasing Access to Inhaled Medicines for COPD and Asthma led by **Professors 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, Board of Directors, Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD), and Professor, University of Exeter, United Kingdom; **Guy Marks**, President, The Union, Board of Directors, NCD Alliance, President, FIRS, Professor, UNSW Sydney, and Honorary Professor, University of Sydney, Australia; and **Heather Zar**, Professor and Chair, Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, University of Cape Town, South Africa.

All inquiries: Leith Greenslade, [leith@justactions.org](mailto:leith@justactions.org)