

Special joint session ERS and WHO

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Launch of the joint WHO and European Respiratory Society regional report

Chronic Respiratory Diseases in the WHO European Region *Toward Health Equity in 2050: a spotlight on COPD and asthma*

Date: 12 June 2025
Venue: Dublin, Ireland

10 April 2025
Original: English

Scope and purpose

The human respiratory system is fundamental for health and wellbeing, closely intertwined with other noncommunicable and communicable diseases. Chronic respiratory diseases (CRDs) significantly impact morbidity, disability, and premature mortality, and are one of the four major non-communicable disease (NCD) groups with a growing global burden.

CRDs include COPD, asthma, interstitial lung disease (ILD), pneumoconiosis, sleep apnoea, pulmonary hypertension and others. Efforts to address respiratory burden have primarily focused on COPD and asthma, which this report highlights.

Risk factors for CRDs include harmful environmental, occupational, and behavioral inhalational exposures. Tobacco is the foremost causal and avoidable risk factor, with damage occurring from the first cigarette. The emergence of e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products adds further harm.

Indoor and outdoor air pollution combined are the second most important risk factor overall and the most significant for children's CRD. Other harmful factors include occupational exposures, temperature extremes, and metabolic risk factors like high or low BMI.

Determining the burden of disease is crucial to identify unmet needs. Compared to other major diseases, there are few population-based studies on CRDs. Globally, an estimated 545 million people have a CRD. In the European region, age-adjusted standardized prevalence rates of CRDs are among the highest, with 81.7 million people living with CRDs in 2021. The burden is expected to increase due to population growth and aging, with disparities across the region.

The 2011 UN General Assembly declaration on NCDs recognized that the incidence and impacts of NCDs, including CRDs, can be largely prevented or reduced through evidence-based, cost-effective, population-wide, and multisectoral interventions. This commitment is echoed in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 3, which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages.

The post-2030 agenda emphasizes addressing health inequalities and ensuring universal health coverage (UHC), vital for tackling CRDs. The WHO European Region's commitment includes national action plans targeting CRD prevention and control, recognizing the need for multisectoral collaboration and sustainable health interventions.

To address the burden, the WHO Regional Office for Europe and European Respiratory Society developed a regional report “Chronic Respiratory Diseases in the WHO European Region. Towards Health Equity in 2050: a spotlight on COPD and asthma”, which provides the analysis of the CRD burden, health system response, and provide an overview of the research and innovation priorities. The report also includes country cases from different parts of the WHO European Region.

On 12th June 2025, WHO and ERS is organizing a joint session aimed on the launch of the joint regional report in Dublin, Ireland. The launch event is a part of the ERS Presidency Summit on Improving Respiratory Health in Europe.

The session will introduce key concepts and insights from the report and explore the current disease burden across the region and the opportunities to implement joined-up strategies and policies, learn from different country experiences across the region, build resilient health systems, research and innovation priorities in CRD prevention and management.

To support the launch, representatives from 53 Member States of the WHO European Region will share perspectives of the challenges and innovations in chronic respiratory diseases, discuss opportunities to contribute to the 4th UN high-level NCD meeting in New York, in September 2025. This will be followed by an opportunity to augment learning through facilitated discussion.

The event will be conducted in English language.