



For Immediate Release

Global report warns of dangerous gaps in respiratory health awareness and research

Authors urge for action plan that involves the public, policy makers, physicians and healthcare professionals.

July 17, 2025 — A new paper published in *The Lancet Respiratory Medicine*, [published July 17, 2025](#), warns that respiratory disease is being critically underfunded and overlooked, with dangerous consequences to public health and global healthcare systems.

The authors of *Breathing Barriers: Bridging Lung Health, Research, and Awareness Gaps*, note that respiratory disease—including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma and pulmonary fibrosis—is among the top causes of death worldwide and the third most common cause of medically assisted deaths in Canada. COPD expenditures alone are equivalent to 0.1% of global GDP annually. Yet the amount of research published about respiratory medicine has been decreasing compared to other disease areas for decades.

In fact, only 4.1% of all research papers indexed in PubMed in 2019 focused on respiratory disease, the lowest proportion in 50 years, noted the authors.

A WHO analysis of 2012-2017 research grants found only 2% of non-communicable disease funding targeted respiratory illness. Similarly, Canada's health research institutes allocated just 4% of 2022 non-communicable disease grants to chronic respiratory diseases, versus 37% for neuropsychiatric conditions, 21% for cancer, 12% for cardiovascular disease, and 5% for diabetes. The funding distribution contradicts disease burden data, where, for example, respiratory diseases surpass diabetes across mortality, morbidity, and prevalence metrics.

“It’s a vicious interplay as low public awareness of respiratory disease leads to low funding allocation and low research output, which perpetuates poor public awareness,” said Dr. Simon Couillard, the paper’s lead Canadian author, a respirologist, professor and clinical researcher at Université de Sherbrooke. Further compounding the issue is a lack of national strategies and outdated health policies that make it difficult to secure investment and public attention. “Respiratory disease remains trapped in outdated narratives, often perceived as the consequence of smoking, despite the growing burden driven by pollution, occupational hazards, and non-smoking-related conditions – many of which are as or more lethal than cancer,” he said.

To address these issues, the authors proposed a three-pronged approach targeting physicians, policymakers and the public by:

- Developing structured national frameworks for consistent research investment, advocacy, and political engagement around respiratory health.
- Empowering patients to lead initiatives that challenge cost-cutting policies, improve insurance coverage and foster research partnerships.
- Training physicians and respiratory specialists to play a more active role in engaging the public about respiratory issues through social media and other mainstream channels.

“At this critical time for respiratory health across the world, we are in position to drive real change,” said Dr. Erika Penz, respirologist and professor at the University of Saskatchewan, and President of the Canadian Thoracic Society (CTS). “By partnering with patients, challenging policies that hinder care, and leading collaborative research, we can change the outdated paradigm influencing respiratory research and priorities and push for support and innovation needed in respiratory care.”

CTS, along with other professional and patient organizations that make up the Canadian Respiratory Roundtable, support the efforts of this international group of authors and their important data around respiratory disease.

It is time to reframe the narrative around lung-related issues, strip away stigma and bring respiratory health into the middle of mainstream conversation.



About the Canadian Thoracic Society

The Canadian Thoracic Society (CTS) is Canada's national specialty society for respirology that brings together specialists, researchers, educators, and healthcare professionals working in respiratory, critical care, and sleep medicine. The CTS advances lung health by enhancing the ability of healthcare professionals through leadership, collaboration, research, learning, and advocacy, and providing the best respiratory practices in Canada.

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