



MEP Lung health Group Event report

#KeepBreathing: A vision for EU action on lung health 2024-2029

With the participation of:

-  Co-Chair of MEP Lung Health Group MEP Tomislav Sokol (EPP/Croatia)
-  MEP Radka Maxová (S&D/Czechia)
-  MEP Stelios Kypourouopoulos (EPP/Greece)

21 February 2024



#KeepBreathing





MEP Lung Health Group event: A vision for EU action on lung health

Background

On 21 February 2024, the MEP Lung Health Group, with the support of the European Lung Health Group, an informal group of nine organisations, gathering 179 patients and healthcare professional associations held an online event on 'A Vision for EU action on lung health 2024-2029', following the publication titled with the same name of the ELHG. The event was hosted by the co-chair of the MEP Lung Health Group, MEP Tomislav Sokol (EPP/Croatia), with the participation of MEP Radka Maxová (S&D/Czechia) and MEP Stelios Kypourouopoulos (EPP/Greece), who discussed the introductory remarks on lung health in Europe led the European Respiratory Society (ERS) and the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA). The event gathered over 80 participants and journalists from all over Europe, under the moderation of journalist Ms. Anya Sitaram.



Panel discussion: The time is now for a lung health policy that helps Europe to #KeepBreathing.

In the EU, 1 in 8 deaths are caused by lung diseases, and numbers are rising. The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the EU and Member States towards more coordinated action on health, primarily focused on crisis prevention and preparedness, while the EU's ambition of a European Health Union has brought to the forefront the many EU instruments to protect public health and to advance health outcomes.

From environmental policies to research priorities, to a vibrant single health market for medicines and digitalisation, the EU's mandate on lung health is crucial and multifaceted. However, policy fragmentation is jeopardising the possibility to alleviate the respiratory disease strain on healthcare systems and improve millions of lives. In this context, the European Lung Health Group launched the #KeepBreathing campaign, an advocacy effort to reduce the fragmentation of knowledge and policies around lung health at the European level.

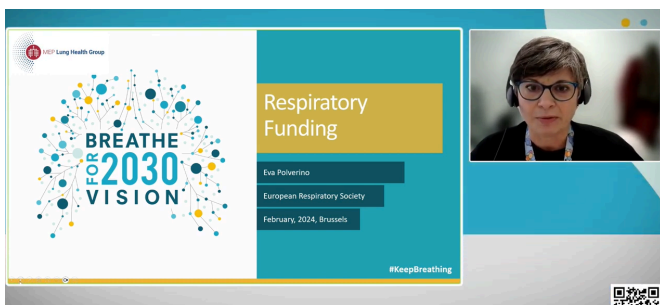
Introduction

The focus of the event was the launch of #KeepBreathing, a campaign steered by the European Lung Health Group. The publication of the **"#KeepBreathing: A vision for EU action on lung health 2024-2029"** outlines the current situation for respiratory disease and points out to the way forward for the EU.



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During the introduction, **Dr. Eva Polverino**, Director of Scientific Relations with the EU from the European Respiratory Society (ERS), provided information about respiratory diseases, their burden, death toll and health years lost (DALYs). **Only in 2019, in the EU, the societal cost for seven major lung conditions including asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) was over 422 billion EUR.** With Europe's rapidly ageing population, it is estimated that a big portion of the population will suffer more from different chronic health conditions, especially as lung diseases usually affect older populations.



Dr. Eva Polverino from ERS

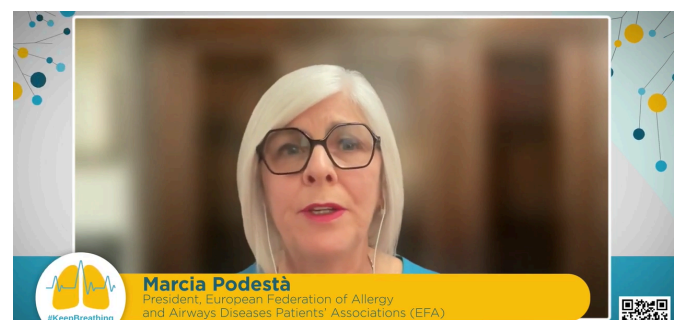
Moreover, the prevalence of pneumonia also increased after the age of 65, which will be aggravated by the challenge of anti-microbial resistance (AMR) and leading to more deaths.

Despite the increasing burden of respiratory diseases due to aging, the effects of climate change and pollution in lung health, as well as the high risk of viral pandemics, there are limited resources and limited budget for research, prevention and healthcare services.

In her conclusion, Dr. Polverino highlighted that while the EU4Health budget 2021 – 2027 is of 5.3 billion EUR, only 5 million EUR were allocated to chronic respiratory diseases. This funding is now at threat as the European Council adopted a decision where 1 billion EUR are to be taken out of the EU4Health budget and reallocated to the support for Ukraine.

Ms. Marcia Podestà, President of European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA), put forward three main areas of EU action that could ensure better lung health in the EU in the medium and long term. Firstly, she stressed the need for EU policies that protect lung health, in a moment where air pollution alone causes around 400,000 premature deaths in Europe annually, yet the efforts to improve air quality do not align with the scientific recommendations.

Secondly, she encouraged the adoption of EU policies that improve care for respiratory diseases, through EU incentives that encourage early diagnosis, multidisciplinary care and long-term care, while developing a European Health Data Space (EHDS) that is people-centred, driving health literacy and patient empowerment.



Marcia Podestà, EFA



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Lastly, she highlighted the crucial role of EU research funding to improve respiratory diseases, as most do not have a cure, and therefore require a strong public-private partnership to allow research to evolve and bring solutions for respiratory diseases.

Panel discussion: The time is now for a lung health policy that helps Europe to #KeepBreathing

During the panel discussion, the issues revolved around opportunities for better lung health, with concrete actions to be taken in order to create a better environment for people living with respiratory diseases.

In his intervention, **MEP Tomislav Sokol (EPP/Croatia)** voiced his concern over the decision to divert part of the EU's health budget, reinforcing the intention to obtain it back as soon as possible for more strategic coordination for health.



MEP Tomislav Sokol

Moreover, MEP Sokol mentioned the opportunities to improve the lives of Europeans through lung health, by advancing environmental policies.

He also highlighted the EU opportunities to provide better healthcare for patients living with respiratory diseases, while ensuring the establishment of a patient-centred European Health Data Space (EHDS), and a pharmaceutical legislation that enables access to medicines across the Union.

MEP Sokol also expressed concern with the long delays on the revision of the tobacco legislation throughout the current mandate, highlighting the hope that the upcoming mandate of the Commission will have more strategic focus on respiratory diseases and policies that improve lung health.

Lastly, MEP Sokol expressed the need for better coordination between the Commission services, as a lot of issues related to lung health are cross-cutting.

What we can do in the European Parliament is to give the priority to health in general [...] what we will do is push for a fully-fledged separate health committee with full legislative powers.

MEP Tomislav Sokol



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MEP Stelios Kypouropoulos (EPP/Greece) reiterated the need to focus on the full spectrum of diseases falling under lung diseases, addressing both prevention and healthcare. On the topic of the EU health budget cuts, MEP Kypouropoulos stated that the future mandate should not focus only on bringing back the 1 billion EUR, but further increasing the resources for health, as funding is imperative for the better protection of citizens and better lung health at the European level.

On the limits of the healthcare systems exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, **MEP Radka Maxová (S&D/Czechia)** said that there is a need for prioritisation for lung health, to allow the healthcare systems to respond effectively to future respiratory challenges, as that would bring overall public health resilience in the EU. Moreover, MEP Maxová highlighted the impact such a pandemic has not only on the efficacy of the healthcare systems and health inequalities, but also the economic impact, as well as its effects on the overall quality of life of citizens.



MEP Radka Maxová

For this reason, she mentioned that the EU must prioritise both preventive measures - such as vaccination programmes, public health campaigns, and early diagnosis of respiratory diseases and better healthcare, also in light of the One Health policy approach.

What is crucial is having resilient health care systems to address inequalities in the European Union, and to face current and health future challenges, like lung health is.

MEP Radka Maxová

Discussing climate change impacts on the health of the European population, especially from climate hazards, MEP Stelios Kypouropoulos mentioned that the EU must be ready to respond to phenomena such as wildfires and heatwaves to protect lung health. He added: ***'It is well known that extreme weather events can impact the quality of air and contribute to worsening respiratory issues that can become chronic, and also lethal.'*** Therefore, reducing the carbon emissions in line with the European Green Deal is the perfect opportunity to prevent climate disasters that exacerbate lung diseases.



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MEP Stelios Kypouropoulos

We need to stand up and make the discussions in order to see 'especially in the next mandate' how we can not only increase [the budget dedicated to lung health] to 20% but further to see results in the area of research and innovation. Also, an overall strategy to address lung health at the European level has to be prioritised.

MEP Stelios Kypouropoulos

During the Q&A discussion, journalists from Euractiv and Brussels Signal submitted questions to the MEPs. MEP Stelios Kypouropoulos touched upon the role of the EU to move towards national lung health plans that include prevention, care and research. He mentioned that there should not be lung health plans only at the national level, but also European-wide, to reduce inequalities and access, while implementing life-course immunisation approach, empowering people to self-manage.

On the EU health budget cuts, MEP Radka Maxová added that while it is not clear which area of the EU health programme would be the most affected by the reduced budget, she proposed that the cut should be divided in the same way for all sectors in healthcare. Resilient health care systems to address inequalities in the European Union, and to face current and health future challenges, like lung health is.

MEP Radka Maxová added that pressure should be put on the Member States to allow for more EU competency in the area of health, to allow for better healthcare and lung protection.



A vision for EU action on lung health 2024-2029

In the closing remarks, **MEP Stelios Kypouropoulos (EPP/Greece)** added that priority should be given to overall strategy to address lung health at European level. This would be something that will impact national legislation, giving direction to the Member State for better lung health protection and quality of life for European citizens.

MEP Radka Maxová (S&D/Czechia) recommended in her concluding observations that health should be the priority of the newly elected MEPs. She advised that relevant stakeholders should contact the new MEPs and push for a strategy on lung health at the European level. Moreover, she reinforced the recommendation of MEP Sokol, to have a permanent fully-fledged health committee at the European Parliament in the new mandate, that focuses solely on health rather than combined with environmental issues.

You may find the **full recording of the event** at www.youtube.com/@EuropeanLungHealthGroup

You may read the European Lung Health Group publication **"#KeepBreathing: A vision for EU action on lung health 2024-2029" here.**



A strong policy towards lung health will improve and save millions of lives, lessen the strain on Europe's ailing healthcare symptoms, and better prepare the bloc for the future crises.

European Lung Health Group



About the European Lung Health Group

The European Lung Health Group (ELHG) is an informal group of nine European level non-profit organisations gathering 179 patients and healthcare professional associations across 34 European countries. Its mission centres around bringing together know-how to support the organisations in empowering patients with lung diseases, improving early diagnosis, optimising multidisciplinary care, progressing quality of life, and research.

The [#KeepBreathing](#) campaign is an advocacy effort of the European Lung Health Group to reduce the fragmentation of knowledge and policies around lung health at the European level. Launched in September 2023, this multistakeholder campaign aims at bringing lung health to the forefront of EU policy discussions and call for clear action to improve prevention, care and research for respiratory disease in Europe.



www.breathevision.eu



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