

The state of COPD in Malaysia



- ▶ Almost **500,000 people** living with COPD^{1*}
- ▶ **Seventh leading cause of death**^{1*}
- ▶ Associated with a **32% loss in workplace productivity**^{2†}
- ▶ Direct and indirect costs over **USD \$2,200** per patient^{2†}

*2021 data †2018-19 data

COPD is a highly debilitating and often fatal lung disease³

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis, deteriorates people's lung function – restricting their airflow, making it increasingly difficult to breathe and potentially affecting every facet of a person's life.³ The severity of the disease increases as it progresses and people with COPD can experience flare-ups that, when severe, require emergency hospital admission.³ However, appropriate care can improve lung health and quality of life for people with COPD.³

Challenges



Protecting population health

There is no term for COPD in Malay; 'asthma' and 'COPD' are often used interchangeably, leading to a lack of understanding of appropriate treatments.⁴



Facilitating access to care

There are significant gaps in access to appropriate care, according to two experts interviewed. Gaps include diagnostics (i.e. spirometry, a globally recommended diagnostic test³), medicines, pulmonary rehabilitation (a globally recommended intervention to promote physical activity³) and palliative care.^{5,6}



Strategies, research & data

Lack of routine data collection limits understanding of the burden of COPD, its effect on health system resources, the impact of risk factors and the evaluation of interventions.^{5,7}

How is COPD being prioritised?

National policies

Overall status: **poor**

COPD is not specifically targeted in health strategies, including strategies focusing on non-communicable diseases,⁸⁻¹⁰ and primary care physicians lack access to nicotine replacement therapies and health promotion materials.¹¹

Clinical guidelines

Overall status: **moderate**

COPD clinical practice guidelines published by the Ministry of Health Malaysia have not been updated since 2009.¹²

Data collection

Overall status: **moderate**

There is no national COPD registry. However, two major Asian respiratory data collection initiatives – RESPIRE and RESPIRE2 – include data indicators for COPD in Malaysia.^{13,14}



'Very few people receive spirometry in primary care to diagnose their COPD.'

– Honorary Professor Ee Ming Khoo
Faculty of Medicine, Universiti Malaya

Case studies

Researchers developed a clinical care pathway to improve COPD outcomes from flare-ups; this resulted in reductions in complications, and shorter hospital stays.¹⁵

Building pulmonary rehabilitation capacity with a 'teach-the-teacher' model: experts train other healthcare professionals to both provide and teach pulmonary rehabilitation; they then cascade training to their peers.¹⁶

Policymakers must take action to:



increase public awareness of COPD to ensure that symptoms are more widely recognised. This could include developing a simple term in Malay to differentiate the disease from asthma



expand training and clarify roles for primary care clinicians, nurses, pharmacists and other health professionals to improve earlier and accurate detection; identify people at high risk of COPD and refer them for spirometry; and improve the use of appropriate medicines and referrals for pulmonary rehabilitation and palliative care



facilitate wider data collection to inform better understanding of the burden and risk factors of COPD, and its impact on health equity and the use of health system resources.

Contributors

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