

The state of COPD in Poland



- ▶ **1.5 million people** affected.^{1*}
- ▶ **12th leading cause of death** – more deaths than breast cancer or prostate cancer.^{1*}
- ▶ **COPD costs society PLN zł 15.9 billion** (€3.6 billion) every year – almost three times more than asthma.^{2,3†}

*2021 data †2019 data

COPD is a highly debilitating and often fatal lung disease⁴

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.⁴ The severity of the disease increases as it progresses and people with COPD can experience flare-ups that, when severe, require emergency hospital admission.⁴ However, appropriate care can improve lung health and quality of life for people with COPD.⁴

Challenges



Identifying it early

There is a lack of proactive detection of COPD in high-risk populations: one in three people with COPD are diagnosed only after being hospitalised with a COPD flare-up.^{5§}

§2019 data



Identifying it early

Early and accurate diagnosis is hindered by poor application of essential diagnostic tools: an interviewed clinician explained that although spirometry (a globally recommended diagnostic test⁴) is available, it may not be performed as often as necessary.⁶



Reducing prevalence

Risk factors for developing COPD or exacerbating its severity are poorly managed: a clinician explained that reimbursement of smoking cessation services and therapies is extremely limited, and that vaccination rates for respiratory infections that exacerbate COPD are also low.⁶

Case studies

Screening services for lung cancer uncover undiagnosed COPD.⁸ The comprehensive lung health assessment offered as part of a screening programme for lung cancer (which included spirometry, questionnaires and electrocardiograms) incidentally found that almost 20% of participants were living with undiagnosed COPD.

The Healthy Lungs Coalition (Koalicja Zdrowe Płuca) advocates for policy and care improvement in respiratory diseases, providing a platform for dialogue among patients, clinicians and decision-makers. They have held meetings in Parliament, and are developing standards for the prevention, detection and treatment of lung diseases.^{9,10}

The Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity Foundation (Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy) supports public healthcare, including care for respiratory diseases.¹¹ Its annual fundraiser in 2024, 'The Grand Finale', was themed 'post-pandemic lungs'. With the money raised, the Foundation plans to purchase equipment to aid diagnosis of respiratory disorders, including COPD.



How is COPD being prioritised?

National policies

Overall status: **poor**

COPD is not specifically targeted in national health strategies,⁷ and there is no comprehensive national plan for respiratory diseases.

Clinical guidance

Overall status: **moderate**

An interviewed clinician explained that respiratory clinicians typically follow international recommendations.^{4,6}

Data collection

Overall status: **moderate**

There is no national or prominent COPD registry. However, there was a nationwide retrospective study of COPD hospitalisations in 2019.⁵

'Vaccination rates are low despite immunisation against seasonal influenza, SARS-CoV-2 and pneumococci being well reimbursed. We need a comprehensive approach, with information campaigns and structural changes to allow easy access to vaccinations.'

– Professor Joanna Chorostowska-Wynimko, Department of Genetics and Clinical Immunology, National Institute of Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases

Policymakers must take action to:



explore the feasibility of using broader lung health checks and lung cancer screening programmes as an opportunity to detect COPD earlier in higher-risk populations



train and certify nurses and other health professionals in respiratory diagnostics (including spirometry) to improve earlier detection



improve reimbursement of smoking cessation support and uptake of vaccinations against respiratory infections to help address risk factors for developing and exacerbating the severity of COPD.

Contributors

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