

Building a Common Strategic Vision for Respiratory Health in Europe: The 21st European Patients' Rights Day 2027

Mariano Votta^{1*} and Bianca Ferraiolo²

¹Director, Active Citizenship Network, c/o Cittadinanzattiva APS, Via Imera, Italy

²Head of the Representative Office to the EU - Senior Manager EU Affairs, Active Citizenship Network, Belgium

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***Corresponding author:** Mariano Votta, Director, Active Citizenship Network, c/o Cittadinanzattiva APS, Via Imera, 2 - 00183 Rome, Italy

Abstract

Despite substantial progress across European healthcare frameworks addressing cardiovascular diseases, oncology, and digital health transformation, respiratory health remains without a comprehensive, unified strategic plan at the European Union (EU) level. In the WHO European Region, 81.7 million people live with chronic respiratory diseases, making them the sixth leading cause of mortality [1] with nearly 400,000 deaths annually-80% of which are attributable to Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) [2]. Addressing this burden requires moving beyond fragmented, disease-specific approaches toward a life-course policy paradigm. The 21st European Patients' Rights Day (Spring 2027, European Parliament, Brussels) —hosted by MEP Brando Benifei and organized by Cittadinanzattiva-Active Citizenship Network (ACN)—will focus on “Investing in Europe’s health from prevention to care: Building a common vision for respiratory health”. Grounded in the principles of the European Charter of Patients’ Rights [3], this policy paper outlines the rationale for establishing a European Respiratory Health Plan and launching a permanent European Respiratory Health Alliance to guarantee equitable, patient-centered, and resilient respiratory care across Europe.

Keywords: Respiratory health; European patients’ rights day; European respiratory health plan; Life-Course Approach; Immunisation

Abbreviations: COPD: Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease; EU: European Union; ACN: Active Citizenship Network; CRDs: Chronic Respiratory Diseases; PAGs: Patient Advocacy Groups

Introduction & Epidemiological Context

A recent report from WHO/Europe and the European Respiratory Society reveals that chronic respiratory diseases (CRDs) – including asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and other lung conditions – are vastly underdiagnosed, poorly managed and significantly underestimated in their impact on health systems across the WHO European Region [1,4]. Despite the fact that they are often preventable and treatable, CRDs are among the leading contributors to disability and death in the Region, particularly as underlying causes of cardiovascular diseases and cancer. They are currently the sixth leading cause of death. In particular, the report shows that chronic respiratory diseases, which affect 81.7 million people in the WHO European Region, have long been overlooked due to insufficient policy

focus and underfunding. This neglect has led to underdiagnosis, misdiagnosis and incomplete data, costing the Region an estimated \$21 billion annually, according to the WHO Regional Director for Europe.

Despite these figures, respiratory health lacks a dedicated EU-wide strategic directive comparable to existing targeted frameworks in cancer or cardiovascular health. The COVID-19 pandemic temporarily placed respiratory care at the center of global political and economic discussions, illustrating that respiratory resilience is fundamentally linked to public health preparedness, workforce productivity, and economic stability. As Europe approaches five years since the acute phase of the pandemic, translating these lessons into long-term health policy action is imperative.

The European Patients' Rights Day and the role of the European Charter of Patients' Rights

Drafted in 2002 by Active Citizenship Network (ACN) [5] —the EU branch of the Italian NGO Cittadinanzattiva [6] —in collaboration with civil society organizations across Member States, the European Charter of Patients' Rights [3] establishes 14 fundamental rights. These include, among others, the right to preventive measures, access to care, innovation, personalized treatment, and observance of quality standards. Established in 2007, the European Patients' Rights Day serves as an annual pan-

European platform to assess, promote, and monitor these rights across EU Member States. The 21st edition, scheduled for Spring 2027 at the European Parliament in Brussels, will be hosted by MEP Brando Benifei [7] and promoted as always by ACN. Gathering over 100 stakeholders—including representatives from the European Commission, Members of the European Parliament, patient advocacy groups (PAGs), scientific societies, and healthcare industry leaders—the 2027 conference will explore how patients' rights can be strengthened through dedicated respiratory health policy (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Logo of the 21st European Patients' Rights Day, promoted by Cittadinanzattiva-Active Citizenship Network.

A Life-Course Approach to Respiratory Health

Respiratory outcomes are shaped across an individual's lifespan—from maternal and child health to adulthood and healthy ageing. Adopting a life-course approach allows health systems to connect primary prevention, environmental health (e.g., air quality and tobacco control), vaccination, early diagnosis, chronic management, and pulmonary rehabilitation.

Key elements of this paradigm include:

- i. **Preventive Measures & Immunisation:** Vaccination against respiratory pathogens (such as influenza, pneumococcus, COVID-19, and RSV) is a vital tool for reducing hospitalization, preventing exacerbations, and mitigating secondary cardiovascular risk. As a member of the Steering Group on Prevention of Respiratory Infections [8], ACN has reinforced calls for a Council Recommendation on the value of immunisation.
- ii. **Digital Health & AI Innovation:** Leveraging Artificial Intelligence and remote monitoring tools aligns with the patient's

right to innovation and personalized treatment, enabling early diagnosis and proactive disease management.

- iii. **Reducing Health Inequities:** Disparities in access to early diagnosis, specialized pulmonology care, and innovative therapies persist across EU Member States, underscoring the need for structured European coordination.

Policy Imperatives: Toward an EU Respiratory Health Plan and Alliance

Building on multi-stakeholder dialogues, policy roundtables [9-11] and recent scientific publications [12-14], Active Citizenship Network is advocating for two major structural deliverables:

- a. **A European Respiratory Health Plan:** A comprehensive policy framework providing strategic direction for prevention, vaccination, early screening, treatment continuity, pulmonary rehabilitation, and research across all EU Member States.
- b. **The European Respiratory Health Alliance:** A permanent

multi-stakeholder platform uniting patient associations, scientific societies, public health experts, policymakers, and industry partners to sustain dialogue, monitor policy implementation, and advocate for respiratory health as a strategic EU priority.

Objectives of the 2027 European Patients' Rights Day

The annual celebration of the European Patients' Rights Day in Spring 2027 aims to:

- I. Elevate respiratory health to a strategic public health priority within the EU policy framework.
- II. Promote a life-course paradigm highlighting prevention, health literacy, early diagnosis, and patient empowerment.
- III. Foster inter-institutional dialogue between EU decision-makers, national health authorities, and clinical professionals.
- IV. Consolidate political momentum for the adoption of a European Respiratory Health Plan.
- V. Formalize support for the European Respiratory Health Alliance.
- VI. Channel policy recommendations into the agenda of the European Parliament's Committee on Public Health (SANT).

Conclusion

Investing in respiratory health extends beyond clinical management; it is a direct investment in the resilience, productivity, and health equity of European society. The 21st European Patients' Rights Day in 2027 will mark a pivotal moment in bridging the gap between fundamental patient rights and structured, European-level policy action in respiratory care.

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