

## **Declaration on the Need for Clean Air**

**ADOPTED BY THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE 14th GARD GENERAL MEETING (virtual) ON October 6-7, 2021, IN SUPPORT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW AIR QUALITY GUIDELINES ISSUED BY THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO) ON SEPTEMBER 22, 2021**

We, members of the Global Alliance against chronic Respiratory Diseases (GARD) [1], a voluntary alliance of medical societies, governmental organizations and patients' associations with WHO working towards a common vision to improve global lung health according to local needs, are extremely concerned for the health of million patients with chronic respiratory diseases (CRD) and other chronic non communicable disorders (NCD) who continue to be exposed to dangerous concentrations of air pollutants.

According to the data published in 2020 by the Global Burden of Disease study [2], outdoor and household air pollution together accounted for approximately 12% of all deaths in 2019; air pollution currently ranks fourth among major risk factors for global disease and mortality, behind tobacco, hypertension, and dietary risks in men, and behind hypertension, dietary risks and high fasting plasma glucose in women.

Indeed, higher deprivation indices and low economic position are usually linked with higher levels of pollutants [3], thus the burden of higher pollutants falls disproportionately on different social groups.

GARD has a long-standing history of support for clean air and the promotion for prevention and control of CRD. In 2010, GARD identified a prioritized research agenda for prevention and control of chronic respiratory diseases [4], which included indoor and outdoor air pollution within the early determinants of CRD.

In 2019, the abatement of air pollution and smoking were included as preliminary actions to the implementation of the "Nature Step to Respiratory Health" [5], the overarching theme of the 12th GARD General Meeting (Helsinki, August 2018).

In 2020, we published the 'Beijing Call to Action for Lung Health Promotion', adopted at the 13th GARD General Meeting [6]. The Section "Fostering multisectoral action to reduce risk factors for CRDS" included the task of promoting intersectoral action to address indoor and outdoor air pollution, by engaging with a range of other sectors and identifying clean-energy strategies to shift away from kerosene, biomass and biofuel burning, and to reduce CO2 emissions.

Further, a group of active leaders of organizations comprising the network of the GARD published a paper on "A global respiratory perspective on the COVID-19 pandemic: commentary and action proposals" [7]. In the section "Proposed actions at the local and community level", it was strongly recommended to partner with respective government agencies to enforce the ongoing fight against air pollution and climate change.

Recently, on September 22, 2021, WHO has published the new Air Quality Guidelines (AQG) [8], which are based on convincing scientific evidence about the harms caused by exposure to low levels of conventional air

pollutants. The new WHO AQG for both long - and short-term exposure in relation to critical health outcomes indicate levels which are largely lower than the previous WHO AQG published sixteen years ago: e.g. 5 µg/m<sup>3</sup> for annual PM<sub>2.5</sub> and 15 µg/m<sup>3</sup> for 24-hour PM<sub>2.5</sub>; 10 µg/m<sup>3</sup> for annual NO<sub>2</sub> and 25 µg/m<sup>3</sup> for 24-hour NO<sub>2</sub> .

Thus, in keeping with the GARD motto “A WORLD WHERE ALL PEOPLE CAN BREATHE FREELY” and in line with the United Nation Sustainable development Goals [9] (7: Affordable and clean Energy; 10: Reduced inequalities; 11: Sustainable cities and communities; 13: Climate action), we urge national and supranational institutions to adopt effective policies to abate air pollution sources and we join the over one hundred scientific societies and patient representative organizations who have signed the declaration prepared by the European Respiratory Society (ERS) and the International Society for Environmental Epidemiology (ISEE) [10] to support the reinforcement of the new AQG issued by WHO.

RESPIRATORY HEALTH means ONE HEALTH and PLANETARY HEALTH

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