

PRESS RELEASE: New European report on digital health in chronic respiratory disease

Survey shows patients willing to embrace digital tools if their key concerns are addressed

BRUSSELS, 14/06/2022 – A new publication reveals that patients worry about data privacy and security, as well as loss of contact with healthcare providers when using digital health tools and services. Policymakers must ensure digital health policies, including the European Health Data Space (EHDS) and the WHO Europe Empowerment Through Digital Health Flagship Initiative, are co-designed with those who will use digital technologies for health: *patients*.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for the digital transition in healthcare. Higher numbers of patients with asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) used remote consultations and other online tools to ensure continuity of care at a moment of crisis.

EFA's new report, *DIG_IT: Asthma and COPD patients' digital journey*, set out to understand chronic respiratory disease patients' experiences, needs, and use of digital technologies in diagnosis and care. Through a survey of over 900 patients in five European countries, the initiative provides a deeper understanding of the benefits, barriers and concerns around digital health, providing powerful insights into the patient digital journey in respiratory health.

Highlights

- **Tech-savvy patients** routinely use digital tools in their daily lives, but awareness/use of highly innovative tools, such as smart inhalers, is low.
- Patients who have used digital tools **view them favourably**, which the report found that this attitude has increased since the impact of COVID-19, as well as the use of digital services.
- **Some patients prefer not to** use digital tools due to lack of familiarity with technologies; healthcare providers need time and skills to **coach patients**.
- **Asthma patients are more likely** than COPD patients to engage with technology; this may be due to the lower average age in this patient population.
- **National differences** in uptake of digital health technology exist across Europe. Key factors include **access** to digital health, prior **investment** and **reimbursement**.
- Patients in all countries expressed **data privacy and security concerns**.
- The DIGIT report provides a series of **tailored recommendations** for policymakers, healthcare providers, patients and the digital sector.
- **Call to action: involve patients today to ensure digital tools meet their needs.**

Susanna Palkonen, Director of the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations, said:

‘This data-rich report shows that patients will use digital tools that make their lives easier and that are freely accessible. The best way to ensure new tools address the needs of patients is for policymakers and industry to include them in the conversation from the beginning. The patient voice must be heard – let’s start now.’

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- **Asthma** is a chronic inflammatory lung disease affecting 30 million people in Europe under 45 years of age, including up to 1 in 5 children and is among the top causes for hospitalisation among children.
- **Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)** is an irreversible disease that makes breathing more difficult. It mainly affects people over the age of 40 and is the third leading cause of death worldwide.
- *DIG_IT: The asthma and COPD patients’ digital journey in Europe*, was conducted by the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA) in the summer of 2021
- **Survey sample:** the DIGIT project surveyed 970 patients – 506 with asthma and 464 with COPD – in Belgium, Norway, Spain, Ireland and the Czech Republic.
- The EFA’s DIG_IT Project, survey, charter, and survey report have been funded with unrestricted grants from EFA's Sustainable Funding Partners Astra Zeneca, Chiesi, MSD, OM Pharma and Roche.
- [Read the full report](#)

The European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients’ Associations (EFA) is a network of 45 allergy, asthma and COPD patients’ organisations in 26 European countries and it works for European patients with allergy, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) to live uncompromised lives, have the right and access to the best quality care and a safe environment.

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