



New research shows nearly half of Australians with symptoms\* of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) have not seen their doctor about it<sup>1</sup>  
– Updated COPD Guidelines also available for GPs –

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The Australian Lung Foundation is today calling upon Australians aged 45 or over who experience shortness of breath to speak with their doctor about a spirometry test. The initiative follows recent research showing that one in six\*\* Australians aged 45 or over<sup>2</sup> has some form of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease is a long term disease of the lungs which causes shortness of breath. It is a group of disorders that includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis. While there is no cure for COPD, there are things people can do to breathe easier and improve their quality of life, particularly if it is identified and managed early.

“This research illustrates that many Australians aged 45 or over may have some evidence of airway obstruction,” said Professor Christine Jenkins, Department of Respiratory Medicine at Sydney’s Concord Hospital. “While only a proportion of these people will go on to have very advanced disease, it should act as a warning sign for people to take action to prevent the disease from getting worse, such as giving up smoking.”

The call coincides with World COPD Day, a worldwide awareness campaign highlighting the group of disorders that includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis. It is Australia’s fourth biggest killer, and the third leading cause of disease burden, after heart disease and stroke.<sup>3</sup>

To support GPs with the diagnosis and management of COPD, the national COPD guidelines developed by the Australian Lung Foundation and the Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand have recently been updated. For more information visit: [www.copdx.com.au](http://www.copdx.com.au).

“The Australian Lung Foundation research shows that nearly half of Australians with symptoms\* of COPD have not seen their doctor about it – that means they are not taking the crucial steps to limit its progress if they do have the condition,” said Professor Jenkins.

“Many people put off seeing their doctor because they mistake their symptoms for signs of ageing or a lack of fitness. It isn’t until simple actions such as going for a short walk become difficult that they realise their condition is more serious and consult their doctor,” said Professor Jenkins.

Professor Jenkins explained COPD can be managed to help people breathe easier and improve quality of life if it is identified early and action is taken to prevent its progress.

“COPD usually occurs in people who have smoked or continue to smoke. As GPs, it is important that we look out for the early signs and symptoms of COPD in our patients and recommend a spirometry test in order to accurately diagnose and begin to treat the disease,” said Dr John Fardy, a General Practitioner on the NSW South Coast with a special interest in respiratory disease.

“GPs should encourage patients to take steps to enable them to improve their quality of life and manage the disease - such as giving up smoking and embarking on an appropriate rehabilitation or exercise program,” Dr Fardy said.

Symptoms of COPD include:

- Shortness of breath compared with others their age
- A repetitive cough with phlegm / mucus most days
- And a history of cigarette smoking (now or in the past)

Medical specialists are becoming increasingly concerned about the impact of COPD upon women. Australian Lung Foundation research shows 20 percent of women aged 45 or over are already displaying symptoms\* which suggest they may have COPD or another lung disease.<sup>1</sup>

“Women may be at greater risk of developing COPD because they have smaller lungs and airways and more sensitive airways, causing them to develop COPD at lower smoking levels,” Dr Fardy went on to say.

Recent Australian research has also found that women may be at greater risk than men of COPD from occupational exposure to biological dust, common in many female dominated industries.<sup>4</sup> Other risk factors include indoor and outdoor air pollution, environmental tobacco smoke, chest infections and some genetic predispositions.<sup>5,6</sup>

To help support those with COPD and reduce the burden of the disease, The Australian Lung Foundation offers LungNet – a national network of patient support groups for people with COPD and other lung conditions. LungNet groups provide an opportunity for people with COPD to meet others living with the condition, to learn more about it and to get involved with local LungNet activities.

– Ends –

#### **Editor’s notes:**

\* “Symptoms” meaning experiencing two or more of the following: 1. Coughing several times on most days; 2. Bringing up phlegm or mucus on most days; 3. In general, getting out of breath more easily than other people your age; 4. Having ever been a regular smoker – either currently or in the past.<sup>1</sup>

\*\* Research undertaken in three inner south-eastern Melbourne electorates among 1,224 adults aged between 45 and 69 (95% CI, 15.3% - 21.6%).<sup>2</sup>

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