



Today - Wednesday 17 November 2021 - is **World COPD Day**. This is a global initiative to raise awareness about Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and highlight the need for more support to reduce the impact of the condition.

COPD is a lung condition that causes long-term difficulties in breathing, coughing and production of mucus/phlegm. People living with COPD may also experience sudden flare-ups of their symptoms as a result of respiratory infections or other triggers such as air pollution. These flare ups often require hospital treatment and are distressing events for people with COPD and their families.

The 2021 theme for **World COPD Day** is “Healthy Lungs – Never More Important”. This year the aim is to highlight that the impact of COPD remains, in spite of the ongoing COVID pandemic. COPD is common, affecting around 1 in 7 Australians aged 40 years and over. COPD is a leading cause of preventable hospitalisations in Australia. While COPD is currently an incurable condition, people with COPD can live for many years with a good quality of life if given the best treatments available to them.

TSANZ is committed to improving knowledge and understanding of lung diseases like COPD through research and health promotion. Members across various disciplines within the respiratory medicine field in Australia and New Zealand are conducting research to better understand how to keep lungs healthy. Below are some examples of such work in people with COPD over the past 12 months.

There have been reports during the pandemic of an increased risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19 in people with COPD. A team led by **Dr Sukhwinder Sohal** at the University of Tasmania, based in Launceston, [recently](#) tested surgically resected lung tissue collected from current and ex-smokers with COPD, normal lung function current smokers and never smokers. Their research study suggested that people with COPD or current smokers could be more susceptible to COVID-19 because of changes in the airways that make it easier for the SARS-CoV-2 virus to infect cells. The team highlighted the importance of quitting smoking and how further research in this area could help protect people with COPD from microbial infections.

Pulmonary rehabilitation is a program exercise and education for people with COPD that helps to reduce breathlessness, improve physical fitness and lower the risk of hospitalisation. The program usually takes places at a hospital, but many people with COPD who would benefit from the treatment are unable to attend due to difficulties with travel and transport, other health conditions or carer responsibilities. [Research](#) led by **Dr Narelle Cox** and **Prof Anne Holland** in rural and metropolitan Victoria looked to understand if pulmonary rehabilitation delivered into the home, over the

internet, was as effective as the usual programs at the hospital. Their research found that telerehabilitation may not be equivalent to pulmonary rehabilitation at the hospital for all outcomes, but is safe and achieves clinically meaningful benefits. Participants who received telerehabilitation benefited from the convenience of the program at home:

“It’s a great experience ... and especially in the comfort of your own home. Like you didn’t have to get dressed up to go out ... You didn’t have to travel to go there. There was the chance to be online with other people that are going through the same thing.”
Participant with COPD from the REACH (Rehabilitation Exercise At Home) study

If more people with COPD can access and complete a program of pulmonary rehabilitation there is potential for significant benefit for both the individual and the health system in terms of improved symptoms and reduced healthcare costs.

If you, or anyone you know would like more information and resources about COPD, the Lung Foundation Australia have a range of free resources that can be found [here](#).

You can also read more about World COPD Day [here](#).

TSANZ COPD SIG Convenors & Deputy Convenors