

Access to essential medicines key to reducing asthma

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Tuesday 2 May is World Asthma Day

Asthma is one of the major noncommunicable diseases, and is an important cause of chronic suffering, disability and preventable deaths in the world. Everyday activities become a huge challenge for the world's of asthma sufferers, says the Chair of the Global Asthma Network <http://www.globalasthmanetwork.org/> Professor Innes Asher from The University of Auckland.

"Asthma causes disabling symptoms in millions of people who struggle to breathe, making ordinary activities extraordinarily difficult – things like going to school, working at a job, looking after children or ageing parents, running or even walking", explains Professor Asher. "We know that about 1000 people die from asthma each day – far more than most people realise. The tragedy is that most of these deaths are actually preventable".

"Asthma essential medicines – a reliever such as salbutamol and a preventer inhaled corticosteroid such as beclometasone – are very effective, and transform people's lives for the better" says Professor Asher. "But many countries in the world still do not have these medicines readily available. This was confirmed again recently by the Global Asthma Network's survey of 120 countries, published in our Global Asthma Report 2014." <http://www.globalasthmareport.org/>

"Even where those medicines are available, their cost is sure to be beyond the reach of many of the asthma sufferers," she adds.

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals include "access to safe, effective, quality-assured and affordable essential medicines for all". The Lancet Commission on Essential Medicines this year recommended that countries should have policies about essential medicines, including making them affordable, assuring their quality and safety, and promoting the quality use of medicines.

Professor Asher sees a way forward: "If all people in the world with asthma had access to affordable essential, quality-assured asthma medicines, there would be much less disability, and fewer deaths. This is achievable, and health leaders need to take action."