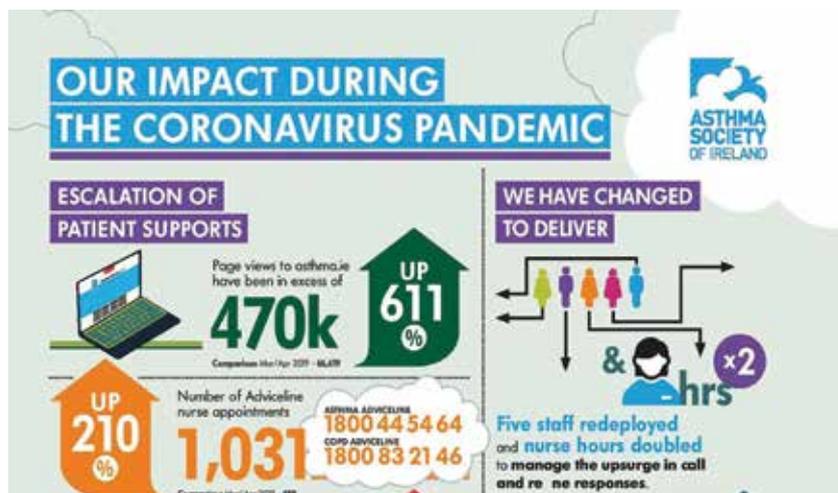


STRATEGY AIMS TO STOP ASTHMA DEATHS BY 2030

Ireland's Asthma Society has experienced a huge surge in demand for its services due to the coronavirus. Following the launch of its new five-year strategic plan, which commits to stopping asthma deaths by 2030, the organisation is now calling on the Minister for Health to conduct a national review of the number deaths.



A total of 380,000 people currently have asthma in this country, and at least one person with asthma dies here every week due to the disease, with an estimated 90 per cent of these deaths believed to be preventable, according to the Asthma Society of Ireland. The organisation's new 2020-2025 Strategic Plan – 'Stopping Asthma Deaths in Ireland' – wants to bring an end to asthma deaths by 2030, and the core focus of their work until 2030 will be to eradicate asthma deaths, noted the Society's CEO Sarah O'Connor.

"While we do know that the vast majority of asthma deaths are preventable in Ireland, there is not sufficient data to precisely identify what is causing them. This leaves healthcare planners uninformed and patients at unnecessarily high risk. It is critical that the Minister for Health commits to conducting a comprehensive investigation into asthma deaths and to publishing a plan to drastically reduce asthma deaths in Ireland."

Since the coronavirus outbreak, the Asthma Society considers that its work has become more critical than ever in recent weeks, and O'Connor said that a reported 10 per cent of those who need intensive care due to coronavirus have asthma as an underlying illness, while a further 22 per cent having another chronic respiratory illness.

BEATING BREATHLESSNESS

"In March and April alone, we fielded 2,251 support calls and queries (up from 293 in the same period in 2019); 1,031 appointments were made with our specialist Asthma and COPD Adviceline nurses (up from 489 in the same period in 2019) while 12,810 Asthma Action Plans were downloaded from our website (up from 356 in the same period in 2019)." The Society has also redeployed five staff, recruited four additional staff members and doubled their nurse hours to field the surge in calls from concerned patients and their carers.

"We also launched our new 'Beating Breathlessness' service during Asthma Awareness Week in May for people with asthma and COPD. This service allows patients with asthma or COPD to message a respiratory specialist nurse to get support, advice and information about their condition." Patients are being asked to save the 'Beating Breathlessness' number (086-0590132) on their phones, and to send a WhatsApp message to an Asthma Society nurse to start their asthma/COPD chat.

As the organisation embarks on its fifth decade, the Asthma Society's new five-year strategic plan brings together its health promotion, education, advocacy, awareness and fundraising functions to deliver the best services possible for asthma patients.

EQUAL ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

"Although asthma can be easily managed for many people living with the disease, it can severely impede patients' physical, mental and financial well-being and, without proper treatment, can – and at times does – prove fatal.

"Without access to specialist care, regular medical reviews and tailored self-management plans, improved prescription protocols and access to life-changing medications, people with asthma will continue to die. The Asthma Society will continue to deliver best-in-class services and supports and advocate on behalf of patients to secure financial supports.

"We're also more focused than ever on ensuring asthma patients are receiving equal access to the highest standard of care and are, therefore, calling on the incoming government to commit to a national review of asthma deaths in its programme for government.

Stopping Asthma Deaths in Ireland can be downloaded from asthma.ie. It was developed on foot of engagement with patients and healthcare professionals through focus groups, surveys, one-to-one meetings and at key events.