Canadian
Pulmonary Fibrosis
Foundation

Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation: Oxygen therapy saves lives and health care dollars

Inequitable access to oxygen for people with chronic lung diseases is un-Canadian

Toronto, Ontario – March 3, 2026: **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** – Oxygen therapy is a lifeline for people living with chronic lung diseases like pulmonary fibrosis. It reduces hospitalizations and improves quality of life. Yet across Canada, access to medically necessary oxygen therapy depends on where a person lives, inconsistent qualification criteria and, in some cases, one's ability to pay. The Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation (CPFF) is calling on health authorities to designate supplemental oxygen therapy as an essential medicine that is publicly funded so those who need it can breathe, regardless of their postal code and ability to pay.

The World Health Organization has designated medical oxygen therapy as an essential medicine and human right. CPFF and the PF community, say it is time for Canada to do the same; upholding the country's commitment to universal health care and aligning with global standards.

"We are hearing from patients across our support groups who are facing significant barriers to accessing oxygen due to inconsistent qualification criteria and out-of-pocket costs. No patient should be denied essential medical therapy because of geography or financial circumstance." said Sharon Lee, Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation. "Our research shows that 50% of health care professionals say provincial guidelines don't allow them to prescribe oxygen therapy to all of their patients who need it. We know that when people get the oxygen they need, their quality of life improves and the burden on the health care system is reduced, both financially and in capacity."

Approximately 7.5 million Canadians live with some form of lung disease; 30,000 alone live with pulmonary fibrosis, a progressive and irreversible lung disease that causes scarring and thickening of lung tissue. In addition, Canadians living with connective tissue diseases like lupus and scleroderma have up to a 30% chance of developing PF, leading to reliance on supplemental oxygen as well.

Blood oxygen levels in many of these individuals fall well below the normal saturation level of 95-100%, leaving them dependent on supplemental oxygen in order to get through each day. Yet some provincial criteria can require saturation levels to be under 90% before supplemental oxygen can be prescribed. Approximately 14% of those needing oxygen bear the burden of paying for at least part of it themselves just to breathe without difficulty according to CPFF's Access to Oxygen in Canada Report.

CPFF invites all Canadians to help them advocate for important changes in their provinces and urge federal health authorities to provide adequate funding so everyone who needs it gets equitable access to oxygen therapy. Details of this important initiative can be found at CPFF's Action Centre.

1. **Classify oxygen as an essential medicine** on Canada's national formulary
2. **Ensure equitable federally funded public coverage** in every province and territory, reducing **out-of-pocket costs** for patients and families
3. **Modernize qualification criteria** so patients can access oxygen when clinically needed (PF patients need significantly more oxygen on exertion than those with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), yet that is what most criteria is based upon)
4. **Eliminate unnecessary re-qualification hurdles** that disrupt care like the Province of Ontario

A study conducted in Ontario reported that $2.58 in healthcare and societal costs are saved for every $1 invested in oxygen therapy. That can be extrapolated to an estimated 258% return on investment across Canada. "Providing oxygen to those patients who need it, may help to reduce unnecessary hospital admissions and improves our patients' quality of life," says Dr. Giovanni Ferrara, respirologist and senior attending physician in Respiratory Disease at the Department of Medicine, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry and Alberta Health Services, in Edmonton, Alberta.

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Contact: Eric McLean at 416-471-1791 or media@cpff.ca for more information.

The Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation is a registered Canadian charity established to provide hope and support for people and their families affected by pulmonary fibrosis (PF), a debilitating and incurable lung disease. Considered a 'rare disease', PF affects approximately 30,000 people in Canada. CPFF works closely with patients, caregivers, medical experts, and governments to support research, education and advocacy.

Interested in interviewing a patient, caregiver, or physician about the challenges of pulmonary fibrosis and why we're #breathlessforchange because #oxygenismedicine. Check out the Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation web site or contact media@cpff.ca

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