PRESS RELEASE

2 Million People Living with Undiagnosed COPD in the UK as New Chiesi Analysis Highlights Stark Regional Disparities across England

- An estimated two million people in the UK are living with undiagnosed Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), missing out on vital treatment and support.[1]
- New Chiesi analysis across England reveals a more than threefold regional gap in the proportion of people who could benefit from COPD checks - from 13.1% in Lincolnshire to 4.1% in South East London.[2]
- Supported by Asthma + Lung UK, Chiesi is spotlighting inequalities in COPD care, highlighting the need for earlier diagnosis and timely access to testing.

Manchester, UK – Monday 16 November 2026 – Chiesi UK and Ireland today share new analysis highlighting the potential scale of COPD underdiagnosis and regional variation across England, highlighting where opportunities for further assessment may be greatest.

As the NHS prepares for winter, identifying COPD earlier could help more people access care before symptoms become severe and emergency hospital treatment is needed. Too often, the condition is diagnosed only after it has progressed and irreversible lung damage has occurred, reinforcing the need for symptoms to be investigated sooner.[3]

Sarah Sleet, Chief Executive, at Asthma + Lung UK, said: *"Without a diagnosis, people do not get the treatment and support they need to stop the damage being done to their lungs. And once the damage is done, there's no going back. Diagnosis needs to happen early to keep people as well as possible, particularly in more deprived communities where there are high levels of COPD. People at increased risk of COPD are being identified through the lung cancer screening programme, which provides a brilliant opportunity to support earlier diagnosis for those most at risk."*

Chiesi's analysis maps out variation in opportunities to identify people living with undiagnosed COPD across every Integrated Care Board (ICB) in England. Key findings from this analysis and wider evidence highlight:

- A more than threefold gap between areas: In Lincolnshire, the population identified for potential COPD checks represents 13.1% of all people registered with a GP - the highest proportion in England - compared with 4.1% in South East London, the lowest.[2]
- Different pressures across England: Lincolnshire, Devon, and Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly have the highest proportions identified for potential assessment. North East and North Cumbria, Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire have the largest numbers, reflecting their larger populations.[2]
- A greater burden on poorer communities: Wider evidence shows that people from the poorest 10% of households are more than two and a half times more likely to have COPD than those from the most affluent.[4] Among people aged 45–54

living with COPD, those in the poorest communities in England are around nine times more likely to be admitted to hospital than those in the least deprived.[5]

- Long waits for answers: Nearly one in four people with COPD report waiting more than five years for a diagnosis, while one in eight waited more than a decade.[4]

Mike Kane MP, Member of Parliament for Wythenshawe and Sale East, said: *"Too many people living with COPD are diagnosed only once their condition has progressed, leading to poorer outcomes and adding to the burden on an NHS already under pressure. Chiesi's case-finding analysis highlights where people at risk of COPD may be living and the variation across the country, helping identify where action is needed most. Earlier identification and diagnosis can help people access care sooner, improve outcomes and reduce avoidable pressure on NHS services. This is exactly the kind of shift towards earlier intervention needed to deliver the Government's ambition for a more prevention-focused NHS."*

The findings sit against a wider postcode lottery in COPD diagnosis and care. Unequal access to respiratory services and spirometry, the breathing test used to help diagnose COPD, can delay diagnosis and opportunities for earlier intervention.[3] For communities already experiencing a greater burden of COPD, these barriers risk worsening outcomes, deepening existing health inequalities and adding to avoidable pressure on NHS services.

Harriet Lewis, Senior Director, Public Affairs & Communications, Chiesi UK and Ireland, said: *"These findings highlight where targeted assessment could help identify more people who may be living with COPD without knowing it. By making local evidence accessible, we aim to support healthcare professionals and NHS leaders in planning diagnostic services around their communities' needs. Chiesi will continue to work with our NHS partners to support earlier diagnosis and access to high-quality lung function testing, helping more people receive the right care at the right time."*

Look Beyond the Bias is Chiesi UK and Ireland's ongoing commitment to challenging bias and addressing health inequalities. Through this analysis, Chiesi aims to bring local evidence, patient voices and NHS collaboration together to help tackle barriers to earlier COPD diagnosis and care. Find out more here: https://bit.ly/3TUwfG4.

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Notes to editors

About Chiesi's case-finding analysis

Chiesi's COPD case-finding analysis draws on Office for National Statistics, Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, and NHS COPD diagnosis data. It estimates a population aged 55–74 with likely current or former smoking exposure who are not currently on COPD registers, adjusted for deprivation and aligned to the NHS Lung Cancer Screening population.[2]

The findings support population health planning and diagnostic prioritisation. They identify opportunities for further assessment and should not be interpreted as

confirmed undiagnosed COPD prevalence. Percentages are expressed as a proportion of each area's total GP-registered population.

To support the case-finding analysis, Chiesi commissioned a policy research report with Future Health Research (FHR) setting out the case for a national pathway to act on signs of COPD identified through the NHS Lung Cancer Screening Programme (LCSP). It is available here: https://futurehealth-research.com/report/nhs-screening-spots-signs-of-serious-lung-disease-in-100000-people-but-there-is-no-requirement-to-diagnose-them-as-hospitals-brace-for-winter/.

About Chiesi's NHS collaborations in COPD

- FRONTIER: A collaboration with NHS Humber Health Partnership which provided a one-stop, nurse-led COPD diagnostic clinic in Hull. More than 500 people were diagnosed with previously unknown COPD. The approach has since secured ongoing NHS funding.
- COMET: A collaboration with Wirral Primary Care Collaborative supporting targeted COPD diagnosis and community follow-up for people identified through NHS Lung Cancer Screening.
- COSMIC: A programme providing NHS primary and community care teams with access to AI-enabled software supporting spirometry test quality and interpretation alongside clinical judgement.

About Look Beyond the Bias

Look Beyond the Bias brings together patient organisations, healthcare professionals and advocacy partners to call out harmful assumptions, elevate patient voices and advocate for inclusive, equitable care. The campaign reflects Chiesi UK and Ireland's ongoing commitment to challenging bias and addressing health inequalities.

About Chiesi Group

Chiesi is a research-oriented international biopharmaceutical group that develops and markets innovative therapeutic solutions in respiratory health, rare diseases, and specialty care. The company's mission is to improve people's quality of life and act responsibly towards both the community and the environment.

By adopting the legal form of Benefit Corporation in Italy, the US, France and Colombia, Chiesi's commitment to creating shared value for society as a whole is legally binding and central to company-wide decision-making. Chiesi is committed to the principles that underpin the B Corp movement and aims to reach Net-Zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2035.
With 90 years of experience, Chiesi is headquartered in Parma (Italy), with 30 affiliates worldwide, and counts more than 7,900 employees. The Group's research and development center in Parma works alongside 6 other important R&D hubs in France, the US, Canada, China, the UK, and Sweden.

For further information please visit www.chiesi.uk.com

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