ABOUT ALLERGY & ASTHMA NETWORK

Allergy & Asthma Network ("Network") is the nation’s leading voice and patient advocate for more than 50 million Americans with allergies and over 24 million with asthma. For 35 years, the Network has worked to end needless death and suffering due to asthma, allergies and related conditions through outreach, education, advocacy and research.

Asthma remains one of the most serious chronic diseases and costly health issues ($80 billion annually) in the United States. Approximately 3,600 Americans die each year due to asthma. The disease has a greater impact on vulnerable populations, including children and older adults as well as those living with lung disease. Populations that are low-income and some ethnic groups also have a higher rate of diagnosed asthma, increased hospitalizations and deaths. Of the millions of Americans living with allergies, there are 15 million Americans at risk for anaphylaxis, which causes approximately 700 deaths annually. One in every 13 children are at risk due to food allergies alone.

Together with patients, families, healthcare professionals and industry partners, the Network seeks to ensure that federal and state laws, policies, regulations and resources support our role in achieving optimal health outcomes for people with asthma and allergies.

OUR MISSION AREAS

I. Outreach

Chronic diseases such as asthma are a major cause of morbidity in the United States. To decrease morbidity and mortality from chronic diseases, patients and their families need to understand the nature of the disease and feel empowered to request medical care based on national guidelines, while including the whole community as a support system.

The Network’s effective outreach, education and communication strategies at the national and local level include asthma and allergy screenings, school-based health programs, attendance at health fairs and online communities. The goal is to help people with asthma and allergies and their caregivers learn how to live well with their condition – and then recognize, request and follow through on high quality, guidelines-based care.
II. Education

Our healthcare system continues to undergo transformative change. The Network supports an emerging structure that provides collaborative, patient-driven preventive care linking clinical, social, public health and government programs and cultural preferences to provide a more holistic approach to care.

Education is key in helping people manage their asthma and allergies. Information is often readily available but providing guidelines-based health resources is a key step in empowering patients. Network resources are reviewed by leading medical experts and available via multiple channels – print, digital and social media, including web-based video in both real-time and archived formats.

III. Advocacy

Advocacy is essential to protect patient health and safety. Network advocates play a crucial role in raising awareness of federal and state healthcare issues, educating policymakers and the general public and removing barriers so that medical care and treatment are more accessible and effective. Healthcare challenges need thoughtful solutions to support patients, their families and communities. Engaging stakeholders and key constituencies is also important in our effort.

IV. Research

Research is essential to better understand how asthma and allergies impact millions of Americans. Our efforts to advance research opportunities and increase patient engagement supports work that leads to innovations in medical treatment options for patients. Continued efforts by the scientific and medical research communities, and funding of federal programs through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and National Institutes of Health (NIH), among others, is essential to improve patients' health outcomes and quality of life.
ALLERGY & ASTHMA NETWORK POLICY PRIORITIES

- Access to safe, effective and affordable medications and treatment options.
- Access to affordable and high-quality healthcare and insurance coverage.
- Funding for allergy and asthma health and research programs.
- Access to innovative therapies and technologies to advance medical treatment.
- Mitigate environmental health hazards.
- End health disparities and move toward greater health equity.
- Modernize food labels.
ACCESS TO SAFE, EFFECTIVE AND AFFORDABLE MEDICATIONS AND TREATMENT OPTIONS

Access to safe, effective and affordable medicines is critical as the rising costs of prescription drug prices puts Americans at risk for poorer health outcomes, especially those with chronic and life-threatening conditions such as asthma and severe allergies. Lack of access to affordable medicines has led to patients not filling a doctor’s prescription, reducing the dosage to make a supply last longer, buying medicines from foreign countries or substituting alternative therapies. Stabilized treatments are necessary for patients with chronic conditions and access to medications is critical.

ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE AND HIGH-QUALITY HEALTHCARE AND INSURANCE COVERAGE

Access to high-quality, affordable healthcare and insurance coverage is essential to achieve the most successful health outcome for patients. This includes adequate coverage for patients who rely on government programs including Medicare and Medicaid.

Rising costs for healthcare services and health insurance premiums represent a growing burden for families. Out-of-pocket costs, including insurance premiums, copays and deductibles, have increased to the point that costs in some instances have largely become unaffordable. This can result in patients cutting back on prescription medications and postponing follow-up care. For people with chronic conditions such as asthma, staying on a medication schedule is essential. Ultimately, when patients forgo medical care it creates a patient population that is in poor health, leading to increases in healthcare spending.

To meet the growing needs of the patient population, the value of the medical workforce (e.g., doctors, nurses and other caregivers) to the healthcare system must also be considered. An educated and skilled workforce and the growing shortage of health workers must be addressed, especially in rural and medically underserved areas.

FUNDING FOR ALLERGY AND ASTHMA HEALTH AND RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Federal health and research programs are essential to improve the healthcare quality and safety for all Americans, particularly those who live with chronic conditions.

Programs that support disease awareness, management and safety under the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Defense and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are essential in the development of best practices in care, monitoring healthcare quality, providing information to the healthcare workforce and convening stakeholders.

Research contributes to understanding of health conditions and funding support programs that lead to treatments and tools that improve disease management and outcomes, thereby improving the quality of life for patients. The research community includes academic health centers, National Institutes of Health and other government funders, not-for-profit foundations, pharmaceutical companies and managed care organizations. Discoveries and insights produced by research help enhance understanding of medications and health disparities and directly impacts patients’ lives.
ACCESS TO INNOVATIVE THERAPIES AND TECHNOLOGIES TO ADVANCE MEDICAL TREATMENT

The discovery, development and commercialization of innovative therapies and technologies (e.g., biologic medications, immunotherapy, telehealth, remote patient monitoring) are important to address unmet medical needs and improve patients' lives.

Many patients who suffer from chronic respiratory conditions like severe asthma and COPD would benefit from greater and more convenient access to a physician. Telemedicine complements existing healthcare resources by increasing access to affordable medical care. This technology would be an effective way to provide disease education and improved disease management, particularly in rural areas, where visiting a doctor’s office can require lengthy travel.

Severe asthma is increasingly a priority for doctors, medical researchers, pharmaceutical companies and patients. The prevalence of severe asthma is estimated to be 5-10 percent of all asthma patients. Biologics are medications designed to treat the source of symptoms, rather than the symptoms themselves, by targeting the cells and pathways that lead to allergic inflammation and breathing problems for people with asthma.

Allergies are potentially a life-threatening health condition that can adversely affect a patient’s health and well-being. Food allergies are increasing among Americans and developments in immunotherapy are helping to decrease symptoms and provide patients with long-lasting relief.

MITIGATE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH HAZARDS

Patients who suffer from asthma and other respiratory illnesses are vulnerable to environmental contaminants from air pollution, and the adverse health effects of climate change. Air pollution and climate change solutions must integrate public health impacts to protect most vulnerable populations.

Ground-level ozone and particulate matter (e.g., dust, dirt, soot, or smoke) and living and/or working within proximity to major sources of harmful air pollution (e.g., major roadways, solid waste landfills) can trigger asthma symptoms. Indoor pollutants and environmental hazards can also trigger asthma symptoms, such as mold, dust mites, cockroaches and mice, cigarette smoke, and living in substandard housing.

The increase of carbon pollution and other greenhouse gases are impacting the climate resulting in rising temperatures and a more expansive growing season, which has caused changes in flowering time and pollen development. The higher concentrations of pollen emitted into the air increases exposure to allergens that trigger asthma flares and exacerbate allergy symptoms. The increase in greenhouse gases is leading to a rise in wildfire severity, droughts, heavy rain events and floods, all putting respiratory health at risk.

END HEALTH DISPARITIES AND MOVE TOWARD GREATER HEALTH EQUITY

Development of health equity interventions are needed to support better health outcomes for all patients. Health disparities (e.g., access to care, poverty, environmental hazards, education inequities, language and cultural differences) cross ethnic and socioeconomic groups and impact individual health and well-being. Asthma and allergy rates are higher in poor urban areas and more common in African American and Hispanic children, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Center for Health Statistics. Proven intervention strategies (e.g., programs, services and policies) are needed to
develop successful health equity interventions.

Health disparities occur as the result of a patient’s increased exposure to indoor and outdoor environmental allergens and irritants that trigger asthma symptoms. Living in substandard housing conditions such as pest infestation, lead paint, faulty plumbing and mold, and overcrowding can lead to health problems such as asthma. And living near major sources of harmful air pollution (e.g., major roadways, landfills) can trigger asthma symptoms.

Poverty can affect access to preventive medications and healthcare. Limited or lack of transportation results in patients rescheduling or missing their medical appointments, delaying their care, and forgoing or delaying medication use. As a result, those patients do not manage their medical conditions properly, leading to poorer health outcomes. Language and cultural differences can be a barrier and education inequities can lead to a lack of basic knowledge and understanding of the disease, impacting patient adherence to treatment plans and use of prescribed medications.

MODERNIZE FOOD LABELS

There is an estimated 32 million Americans living with food allergies, including 6 million children under age 18. Food allergy is the most common cause of anaphylaxis – a severe or even life-threatening allergic reaction. Sesame allergy has increased over the years in part due to the growing number of products containing sesame seeds and sesame oil – foods, cosmetics, lotions and pharmaceutical items.

The Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004 (FALCPA) became effective in 2006 and governs how the eight major food allergens – milk, egg, peanut, tree nuts, soy, wheat, fish and crustacean shellfish – are represented on packaged foods in the United States. Sesame is not recognized as a major food allergen in the United States, unlike Canada, the European Union, Israel, Australia, New Zealand and many others. In 2016, a report by the National Academy of Sciences recommended that sesame be listed as a major food allergen and identified on food labels.

Not labeling for sesame leaves consumers with sesame allergy unable to protect themselves from accidental exposure: adults with sesame allergy are more likely to report visiting the emergency department for a food allergy reaction in the past year than adults with any other allergy. There are also concerns over unintentional cross contact with a food allergen which can occur during manufacturer food processing and lead to a severe allergic reaction. While allergen avoidance is the key to managing a food allergy, successful avoidance requires individuals to have accurate information on the ingredients and possible allergenic contaminants in food labeling.