
Mr José Luis Castro Appointed as WHO Director-General Special Envoy for Chronic Respiratory Diseases



The World Health Organization (WHO) is pleased to announce the appointment of Mr José Luis Castro as WHO Director-General Special Envoy for Chronic Respiratory Diseases.

Chronic respiratory diseases (CRD), including asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), affect nearly half a billion people worldwide. These diseases are major causes of death and disability, with COPD being the third leading cause of death globally. In 2019, 3.2 million people died from COPD and 500 000 from asthma. Despite their significant impact, these diseases have often been overlooked in global health discussions, lacking the necessary recognition and resources.

"With his profound expertise and longstanding commitment to improving global health, Mr Castro is uniquely positioned to support our efforts in tackling chronic respiratory diseases. His leadership will be instrumental in raising awareness, mobilizing support, and implementing effective solutions to improve respiratory health worldwide," said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General.

WHO's work on CRD focuses on integrating the diagnosis and management of asthma and COPD into primary health care, while highlighting tobacco smoke, air pollution, and infectious diseases like tuberculosis and pneumonia, as risks to lung health. The appointment of Mr Castro aims to support WHO by spotlighting the significance of respiratory health.

As Special Envoy, Mr Castro will:

- raise awareness and promote solutions, highlighting chronic respiratory disease issues and support WHO's strategies to address them;
- engage global and local support, by encouraging cities, countries, and stakeholders to integrate respiratory health into local health policies;
- support WHO initiatives and funding, by promoting WHO's CRD programme, supporting CRD integration into primary health care, and seeking increased investment from governments and donors; and
- enhance public engagement and advocacy, by collaborating with media, governments, and organizations to raise awareness and spread WHO's health messages.

"I am deeply honored to serve as the WHO Director-General Special Envoy for CRD," said Mr José Luis Castro. "With a steadfast dedication to improving public health and a vision for global collaboration, I am eager to work alongside WHO and its partners to elevate the importance of respiratory health on the global agenda. Together, we will strive to ensure that every individual, regardless of their circumstances, has the opportunity to breathe freely and live a healthy life."

Mr Castro is completing his tenure as President and CEO of Vital Strategies, the global health organization he founded and led for 20 years. During his tenure, Vital Strategies grew from a small nonprofit primarily focused on lung health to an organization with a budget of US\$ 100 million and a global team of more than 400 people working on global health issues ranging from tobacco control to air quality to overdose prevention and data for health.

Mr Castro's appointment demonstrates WHO's commitment to prioritizing respiratory health. His efforts will support WHO in shaping policies, building partnerships, and driving actions to improve the health of people worldwide. Mr Castro will start his role on 1 September 2024. He joins other notable Special Envoys such as Sir Liam Donaldson, WHO Director-General Special Envoy for Patient Safety, and Dr Vanessa Kerry, WHO Director-General Special Envoy for Climate Change and Health.

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