

# Uncontrolled asthma could cost U.S. economy more than \$963 billion in the next 20 years

July 1 2019, by Erik Rolfsen

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The medical costs of uncontrolled asthma, combined with productivity losses due to sick days, could cost the U.S. economy more than \$963 billion over the next 20 years, finds a new study led by researchers at the University of British Columbia.

In addition, Americans with [uncontrolled asthma](#) could lose more than 15 million years of health combined over the period, the analysis showed.

"Up to half of the estimated 15 million Americans with [asthma](#) aren't successfully controlling their symptoms. Asthma imposes a significant burden on the economy and quality of life, but we have not previously known how much of its societal impact is due to lack of proper disease management, and therefore preventable," said Mohsen Sadatsafavi, the study's senior author and a professor of pharmaceutical sciences at UBC. "As far as we know, this is the first estimate of that avoidable burden."

The authors analyzed population projections, prevalence of asthma and asthma control levels in teens and adults in all 50 U.S. states. They included data from the Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. National Health and Wellness Survey, and the Global Burden of Disease study.

The results, recently published in the *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*, also include state-level projections, all available through an interactive [web portal](#).

Asthma is a long-term condition that inflames and narrows the airways in the lungs and makes it hard to breathe. With proper management, it can be successfully controlled in most patients. The researchers emphasize that current methods for controlling asthma are widely recognized to be safe and effective in the vast majority of cases.

"Therapies like avoiding triggers and using inhaled corticosteroids are effective in preventing asthma attacks and reducing inflammation or swelling in the airways," said study co-author Dr. Mark FitzGerald, a professor of medicine at UBC and a respiratory physician at the Lung Centre at Vancouver General Hospital.

"Moving forward, it will be important to strengthen doctor-patient communication and encourage patients to follow recommended asthma treatments like avoiding asthma triggers, taking their medications consistently and using the correct inhaler technique," added FitzGerald, who's also director of the Centre for Heart and Lung Health at Vancouver Coastal Health.

The authors previously studied the asthma burden in Canada, where they found that uncontrolled asthma could cost the Canadian economy more than \$200 billion in direct health-care costs and productivity losses combined.

"These staggering numbers are a wake-up call, not only in North America but in other economies where there may be less information on the impacts of asthma," said Sadatsafavi. "While we cannot eliminate asthma from our communities, we need to ensure asthma patients receive the best care possible—to protect their quality of life and control the costs imposed on our health care systems."

**More information:** Mohsen Yaghoubi et al. The Projected Economic and Health Burden of Uncontrolled Asthma in the United States, *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine* (2019). [DOI: 10.1164/rccm.201901-0016OC](https://doi.org/10.1164/rccm.201901-0016OC)

Provided by University of British Columbia

Citation: Uncontrolled asthma could cost U.S. economy more than \$963 billion in the next 20 years (2019, July 1) retrieved 5 May 2024 from

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