



EUROPEAN RESPIRATORY SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS







BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Our purpose, as BestCities Global Alliance, is to harness the power of collaboration and community to create positive impact through business events. Our research, initiatives such as Incredible Impacts and the Madrid Challenge, our interactions with clients and destinations - all tell us that education is a priority if the industry is to understand the positive impact that can be created from events and their role in making it happen.

We have created several case studies which we hope will provide inspiration and learning about how a destination has benefited from hosting an international congress and how the association has moved closer to its mission as a result of holding the congress.



BACKGROUND TO THIS CASE STUDY – EUROPEAN RESPIRATORY SOCIETY (ERS) INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS

In 2019, the ERS in collaboration with the European Lung Foundation (ELF) received an Incredible Impacts Awards for their Healthy Lungs for Life Campaign (HLfL) launched at their Congress in Madrid in 2019.

Healthy Lungs for Life Campaign (HLfL) is a global public awareness campaign that raises awareness of the importance of lung health through a range of events, projects and promotional activities. Each year the campaign launches at the ERS International Congress. Following the launch the focus shifts to encouraging patient groups, healthcare professionals and politicians to take up the HLfL mantle and hold events and activities in their local area.

The European Respiratory Society (ERS) is an international membership organisation that brings together physicians, healthcare professionals,

scientists and other experts working in respiratory medicine and is one of the leading medical organisations in the respiratory field. Its mission is to promote lung health in order to alleviate suffering from disease and drive standards for respiratory medicine globally. The Society plays a key role in raising awareness of lung disease to politicians, working closely with the European Lung Foundation to extend that reach to the public and patients.

The ERS International Congress is an annual event attracting over 20,000 of the world's respiratory experts to highlight all the latest advances in respiratory medicine and science. It has been to three BestCities destinations – Berlin, Copenhagen and, most recently, Madrid.

THE LEGACY JOURNEY

We caught up with Pippa Powell, Director of European Lung Foundation, to find out how her legacy journey has progressed since her conference was held in Madrid in 2019.

The European Respiratory Society (ERS), together with ELF, started its legacy journey in 2014 and although the Incredible Impacts Award (IIP) was not the starting point of that journey the recognition they received has helped sharpen their focus and provided a platform for further growth. The Society has embarked on a significant legacy journey, focusing most recently on sustainability, partnership development, advocacy and inclusion.

During the pandemic, Pippa and her ELF colleagues and Werner Bill, the Executive

Director of ERS and his colleagues, used the time to reimagine their approach to legacy. Education remained a priority and the focus shifted to producing and publishing material online; taking into account new topics. New materials included a focus on climate change, recognising its impact on respiratory health as well as material for children to use in schools. Lung disease has historically been considered a disease of old age and self-inflicted, but in fact the recent evidence has shown that some of the biggest damage to lung health is done in childhood. Exposure to air pollution and cigarette smoke for example, at a young age, can lead to a higher likelihood of developing lung disease in later life. Hlfl also started a grant scheme to fund organisations running Hlfl events in their own local communities.



SUSTAINABILITY

ERS has made a conscious effort to reduce their environmental footprint. In 2024 registrants of the ERS Congress will be asked to consider donating alongside their registration fee to support two climate protection projects. '[Efficient cook stoves for returnees in Burundi](#)', and '[Forest conservation through efficient cook stoves in the Himalayas](#)' were both selected due to their focus on clean air alongside their alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. ERS pledged to double all donations made.

- Reducing the audience capacity for the event and making online attendance possible
- Eliminating single-use plastics, ceasing to print programs and promoting environmentally conscious travel options.
- Collaborating with venues to implement sustainable practices like using water coolers instead of bottled water, renting reusable items and minimising waste.

Other measures include:

- Offsetting staff and leadership travel by implementing staff policies to favour environmentally conscious travel options





PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

During the pandemic, ELF and ERS invested their time reaching out to other related organisations that could help them deliver on their mission – strengthen the messaging around the importance of healthy lungs and respiratory diseases.

Valuable collaborations were fostered to enhance the HLfL initiative. In particular, with the [Clean Air Fund](#). This collaboration allowed ERS and ELF to enhance their advocacy efforts, particularly around clean air legislation. A collaboration with C40 Cities led to invitations from other

cities to support their clean air initiatives, showcasing ERS and ELF’s influence beyond their conference destinations.

Pippa Powell, Director of ELF, stated, *“Particularly with the chronic disease conferences and health conferences, we’re often coming with really similar messaging. So we look for occasions and opportunities to strengthen each other’s messaging, amplify messaging and build on messaging. That’s going to have way more impact...”*

ADVOCACY

The Healthy Lungs for Life Campaign (HLfL) focuses on public health awareness and advocacy for respiratory health and is closely intertwined with the annual congress. It is a platform to influence policy and a great example is in 2023 when Milan hosted their congress. In partnership with the Clean Air Fund, HLfL addressed a critical clean air vote in the European Parliament, with Italy posing a significant barrier. The Mayor of Milan, aiming to introduce a clean air zone, sought their help to connect with the city and communicate the health benefits.

ERS and ELF facilitated a press conference with the Mayor of Milan, the President of Lombardy, and a national representative, highlighting the need for action. The advocacy efforts of ERS, ELF and the Clean Air Fund were acknowledged in the European Parliament, highlighting the healthcare community’s role in pushing for cleaner air. The legislation went through.

Seeking to broaden the message around clean air initiatives ERS and ELF also created advocacy packs for delegates at the Congress to say, “You need a voice in this too. Go back right to your local policy

maker, write to your MEP, and let’s aim to have a stronger voice.”

Since winning the Incredible Impacts Award the HLfL Campaign is now incorporated into the Congress rfp. The campaign would not have started without the Congress and whilst it could survive independently, its connection to the Congress remains essential. Recently, ERS and ELF secured European Commission funding for Healthy Lungs for Life initiatives, which will focus less on the conference and more on political aspects. This funding also supports school programmes in Hungary, Portugal and Poland, demonstrating how the Congress’s legacy continues long after the congress has left its host destination.



INCLUSION

The ERS Congress has made a conscious effort to significantly diversify its stakeholders and enhance inclusivity, particularly for women, youth and patient organisations. Dedicated sessions for women in respiratory medicine and research have been introduced, aiming to address gender disparities and support women in the field. Women's networking sessions aimed at fostering connections, mentorship and support among female professionals, enhancing their participation and visibility have also been introduced. There is also a deliberate effort to encourage more women to apply for scientific awards, addressing the gap where women might not feel as confident in applying compared to their male counterparts.

For the first time, a youth group has been developed in ELF with a remarkable 16-year-old chair who will be actively participating and chairing sessions. This marks a major step in involving young people in the congress. Additionally, patient representation has grown, with around 150 patient representatives attending, up from just a handful in previous years. Patient speakers in about 20 sessions now influence the narrative, ensuring that patient priorities and concerns are integrated into scientific discussions, thus enriching the overall dialogue.





THREE RECOMMENDATIONS

When asked for three tips or recommendations for meeting planners looking to intentionally plan for impact and legacy in their conferences, ELF Director Pippa Powell recommended the following:

- 1. Have a Clear Mission** - define a strong, clear mission that guides your activities. For Healthy Lungs for Life, it is “healthy lungs through a lifetime,” which directs all topics, whether clean air, tobacco or physical activity.
- 2. Connect Locally** - engage with local stakeholders and understand their priorities. Tailor your event to the specific needs and issues of the host city and its organisations to ensure relevance, effectiveness and sustainability. But also think beyond the host city and engaging in other locations.
- 3. Make it Exciting and Fun** - create an engaging and enjoyable atmosphere for participants. Additionally, highlight the broader political and societal impacts, encouraging delegates to think beyond the event about how their work influences patient lives and future policies.

SUMMARY

ERS together with ELF has made substantial progress in their legacy journey despite the challenges posed by the pandemic. Their commitment to sustainability, partnership development and advocacy has not only enhanced their immediate impact but also ensured a lasting legacy in respiratory health awareness and policy influence.



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