

Benefits of Integrated People-Centred Care in Times of Crisis: Moving Towards More Efficiency in European Health Systems

The COVID outbreak has shown that integrated people-centred care needs much more attention and support from health authorities across Europe. The current crisis has exposed how essential it is for governments to establish sustainable investments in health services, health education and comprehensive healthcare systems. In responding to such major outbreaks as we are all encountering these days, the community supported services have underlined their important role. Feeling responsible for each other's health has brought citizens to overcome the challenges to comply with the heavy social restrictions and to become much more attentive and even vigilant towards one's health. However, this pandemic has also shown that certain vulnerable populations and especially people affected by chronic and rare diseases were having difficulties in accessing healthcare services.

Strengthening health policies entails to implement the One Health approach in all sectors of our society. The state of our health should become an overall reference when taking everyday decisions and should be systematically considered when defining the economic and social recovery strategies that Europe and its Member States are requiring.

AHF Europe and PROMIS acknowledge the important work that has been initiated by the European Commission to strengthen the integrated people-centred care in European countries. In recent years several EU projects established a network of engaged stakeholders and created some political momentum for such a health model. Our organisations are honoured to build further upon the solid basis of this important work from the past and to present innovative approaches for the future. It is essential for people-centred care to be seen as a holistic transboundary approach.

Efficient and inclusive healthcare systems in today's world should bend on engaging and stimulating the workers and to invest in modern human resources policies. Such investment starts by restructuring the education for young health professionals and by changing the long-standing hierarchical structures and approaches. We strongly believe that the results from such a paradigm shift are worth the investment and that this would bring economic and social benefits in the short and long term.

In today's healthcare systems there is a division between medical and social care. This division has all the more become visible during the COVID-19 crisis, where vulnerable households but also youngsters, elderly and lonely people are feeling the negative effects. Integrated care and the simple fact to have one point of contact for all related healthcare and social issues would simplify access for these vulnerable patients and their families. Getting basic health care in one place not only helps to take a comprehensive look at people's health, but it also allows to remain engaged throughout the healing or treatment process. Establishing a trusty relationship with the health professionals is especially relevant for people affected by chronic diseases that are requiring a life-long assistance.

It is time to consider such a paradigm shift and to start focussing the healthcare services towards people and healthy families and not towards the diseases. We should put the person at the centre of the health system, add focus on preventive care, step away from the formalised relationships and engage health professionals and patients in a much closer treatment process.

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