



European
Commission

Cross-border healthcare

**Easier access to healthcare
for EU citizens anywhere in the EU**

Cross-border healthcare enables patients to seek medical services across the EU and helps citizens find relevant information more easily in other EU countries. Numerous EU projects are making sure that the concept of seamless cross-border healthcare provision continues to gain strength.

An EU Directive is driving cross-border healthcare

As cross-border healthcare in Europe becomes a reality, there are moves to clarify issues such as access and reimbursement, as well as to clear up legal uncertainties and make sure patients' expectations are met. The role of EU National Contact Points for cross-border healthcare is pivotal in providing support to EU citizens who travel abroad for medical treatment.

A major step in this direction was the adoption of Directive 2011/24/EU on patients' rights in cross-border healthcare. The Directive required all EU Member States to implement these rights by October 2013. In 2015, a study from the European Commission evaluated progress and declared the network of National Contact Points a success story in the making.

In parallel, the Commission's Cross-border Healthcare Expert Group, which brings together representatives from all EU countries to provide advice and expertise on cross-border healthcare, is also supporting the Directive. The benefits of these strategies and policies are being directly felt by EU citizens, who now face far fewer barriers if they want to have a consultation in another EU country, for example.



Pan-European cooperation in healthcare supports seamless EU integration

The EU's Third Health Programme (2014-2020) sets supporting and encouraging cooperation among Member States as a key objective. In this vein, the European Commission is funding studies and projects supporting cross-border healthcare cooperation.

There are two important ways in which cross-border healthcare aligns perfectly with advancing cost-effective disease prevention – one of the Health Programme's key operational objectives:

As an EU national, if you are suddenly taken ill or have an accident during a temporary visit to another EU country, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland, you are entitled to use the public healthcare services on the same terms and at the same cost as citizens or residents insured in that country, because of the European Health Insurance Card. Each country has its own rules for public medical provision. In some, treatment is free or partially free. In others, you have to pay the full cost and then claim a refund. If you require medical care, keep all your bills, prescriptions and receipts so that you can apply for reimbursement in the country you are visiting or, failing that, when you get home.

The European Health Insurance Card is available free of charge from your national health insurer and proves that you are insured in an EU country. It simplifies the procedures and helps to speed up the reimbursement of costs.

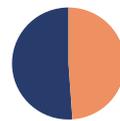
- it enables patients to seek treatment in other EU countries based on their existing national health entitlements;
- it facilitates the movement of expertise.

Increased mobility leads to better use of resources and can help address staff shortages.

These exchanges can spur innovation in healthcare and promote sustainability, in line with another key pillar of the Third Health Programme's general objectives.

Cross-border health cooperation is also important in treating rare diseases and more specialised medical cases, for which not every country has the required critical mass.

REIMBURSEMENT OF HEALTH COSTS



Only 49 % of EU citizens believe they are informed about the forms of healthcare for which they can be reimbursed in their own country.



Only 17 % of EU citizens believe they are informed about the forms of healthcare for which they can be reimbursed in another EU country.

Empowering Europe's National Contact Points

Study: Cross-border.INFO
Cross-border health services: enhancing information provision to patients

- Duration** 2016-2018
- EU funding** Up to € 250 000
- Countries** EU-wide
- Link** To be published on DG Sante website in 2018

How effective are the EU's National Contact Points (NCPs) in offering information on accessing cross-border health services? A thorough study that is currently underway aims to answer this question. Entitled '*Cross-border health services: enhancing information provision to patients*', the study is developing not only solutions to support NCPs in providing cross-border healthcare information, but also a manual to help patients start collecting information regarding their medical treatment abroad.



DID YOU KNOW?
Fewer than 2 in 10 citizens

feel that they are informed about their cross-border healthcare rights.



In parallel, the study team is thoroughly assessing NCP websites in all EU countries and conducting surveys and pseudo-patient exercises to help assess and improve the NCPs' capabilities.

Part of the study involves development of training material, guiding principles and indicators related to service quality that will enable the NCPs to provide good information to patients. While the study is challenging due to differences between EU Member States and their health systems, its comprehensive investigation will no doubt strengthen the NCPs' hand in helping patients' health literacy at home and abroad.

Collaboration clears the way for safer, better healthcare

Study: Cross-border.CARE

Cross-border cooperation: capitalising on existing initiatives for cooperation in cross-border regions

Duration 2016-2018

EU funding Up to € 260 000

Countries EU-wide

The success of cross-border healthcare is reliant upon pan-European cooperation among health services – from providers and hospitals to insurance agencies and insurance schemes. An ongoing EU study entitled '*Cross-border cooperation: capitalizing on existing initiatives for cooperation in cross-border regions*' is mapping cross-border initiatives in selected fields of health that have been developed with the support of European funding across the EU.

The study is also documenting the benefits and successes of cross-border collaboration that have emerged from previous EU-funded initiatives. Armed with this valuable information, the study team will offer guidance on shaping and enhancing cross-border healthcare collaboration.



Topics under investigation include patient safety, quality of care, and reimbursement fraud. A key part of the study involves outlining the opportunities for cross-border collaboration over the next decade.

Overall, the study represents an important stock-taking and foresight exercise and thus complements the implementation of cross-border healthcare across the EU.

Doctors, laboratories and hospitals now know the challenges involved in practicing elsewhere in the EU

Study on cross-border health services: potential obstacles for healthcare providers

Duration/start date 2015-2017

EU funding Up to € 211 550

Countries DE, FR, IT, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE, SI, UK

Recognition of professional qualifications, free movement of people and services and open health borders help doctors to establish themselves in other EU countries. They also allow laboratories to provide diagnoses for patients from other Member States, while hospitals can open branches across the border.

A recent study on cross-border health services outlined potential obstacles to practising or providing services in other EU countries, including online consultations and ePrescriptions.

The findings make interesting reading for general practitioners, physiotherapists, medical laboratories and



hospitals operating outside their home country – they highlight issues related to the recognition of professional qualifications, language requirements, and registration with regulatory bodies.

Beyond the obvious, such as language requirements, the study also highlights other trials that healthcare providers might face when practicing abroad, such as not being familiar with the specifics of the healthcare system and the costs associated with obtaining certified translations of supporting documents to endorse their application for the right to practice.

An EU network of hospitals is streamlining patient care and cross-country payments

HONCAB project

Support creation of a pilot network of hospitals related to payment of care for cross-border patients

Duration/start date 42 months, 2012-2016
EU funding € 529 880
Countries AT, BE, FR, DE, EL, HU, IT, MT, SI

Identifying the financial and organisational requirements tied to receiving healthcare in another EU country is crucial in helping hospitals streamline patient care and in facilitating cross-country payments. A noteworthy initiative in this direction was launched through this EU-funded project.

The project established a pilot network of hospitals across the EU. The network implemented a system to exchange information on payments for cross-border patients, quality of care and patient feedback. This has also enabled hospitals in different EU countries to compare differences between treatments for similar indications or diseases, along with their costs, resulting in recommendations for organising and managing cross-border payments.



Interoperable Europe-wide patient registries good news for travelling patients

PARENT joint action

Cross-border Patient Registries Initiative

Duration/start date 43 months, 2012-2015
EU funding € 2 016 231
Countries EL, ES, FI, HR, HU, IT, MT, PT, SI, SK

The large amounts of data that can be anonymously gathered from patient registries are an invaluable resource for the development of better therapies, treatments, policies and procedures. There are already hundreds of registries across Europe that share information on specific diseases or treatments. If all these registries were linked and fully interoperable, the result would be a formidable resource for quality healthcare provision.

This EU initiative untitled 'Cross-Border patient registries initiative' and part of the EU's eHealth network, helped Member States improve registry quality and interoperability through recommendations on how to streamline registry management and address data protection issues. The global picture emerging from this convergence will support not only treatment but also surgery.



Find out more

Directorate-General for Health and Food safety of the European Commission (DG SANTE) on cross-border healthcare
https://ec.europa.eu/health/cross-border_care/policy_en

Consumers, Health, Agriculture and Food Executive Agency (Chafea)
<http://ec.europa.eu/chafea/index.html>

Database of actions co-funded under the EU Health Programmes
<http://ec.europa.eu/chafea/projects/database.html>



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