

Recommendations to Improve Integrated Care Delivery across the EU

Based on the lessons learned, outcomes and experiences of the SUSTAIN project, the SUSTAIN partners aim to make recommendations for policymakers, service providers, and the research community to further improve integrated care delivery for older people across the EU.

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Policy Recommendations

- **Promote integrated care training and education:** at a national level, education and training should be centred around (older) persons' needs, inter-professional collaboration, communication skills, and information sharing. At EU level, policymakers should emphasise the importance of professional development.
- **Ensure dedicated funding for integrated working:** policy-makers at national, regional, and local levels should define a clear vision, commit to removing or at least minimising perceived barriers, ensure dedicated funding for integrated working and by supporting stakeholders in creating integrated care networks.
- **Support good practice sharing:** EU-funded initiatives such as SUSTAIN provide guidance for broader implementation and scaling up of good practices. Policy-makers at national, regional, and local levels are strongly recommended to creatively support good practice sharing and to facilitate knowledge exchange, both within and between regions and countries.
- **Create a robust legal framework that enables data sharing and protection:** policy-makers are recommended to improve technological infrastructures that enable seamless data sharing together with robust data protection and that can be operated through inter-operable national digital systems to support well-coordinated integrated care systems.

Recommendations for the Research Community

- **Consider alternative study designs:** step beyond the more common research designs such as RCTs and apply mixed method approaches, case studies and realist evaluations.
- **Develop appropriate tools and approaches to engage and capture experiences of users and their informal carers:** there is a clear need to employ more innovative data collection techniques towards methods that are interactive, engaging and experiential and take account of ageing e.g. talking mats
- **Fund research on integrated care economic evaluation:** the focus must move away from traditional health economic models towards a more realistic and pragmatic perspective of what can be measured. Recasting cost objectives towards investigating a 'better use of resources' within the integrated care environment may be a start.

Recommendations for Service Providers

- **Starting-point of improving care is users' and informal carers' needs:** a shift is needed from 'what is the matter with you' to 'what matters to you'. The result may be that a different operationalisation of 'person-centredness' in integrated care is needed.
- **It is all about health AND social care needs:** strategies that can be put in place include the involvement of a broad range of professionals and volunteers in the care process, paying equal attention to both health and social care needs e.g. by organising multi-disciplinary or so-called case conferencing meetings, using a single shared multidimensional assessment form or conducting care planning processes through home visits.
- **Start with a small-scale improvement first:** it is important to design and implement a small-scale project because it is then more likely to be implemented successfully.
- **Find common ground:** shared vision and project goals need to be consistent with both local organisations' priorities and local/regional policy.
- **Build trust and understanding:** for organisations and professionals to collaborate, the relational elements of trust and understanding should be built both on professional and management levels. Activities like multidisciplinary meetings to discuss cases and sharing information from needs assessments or sharing care plans help foster inter-professional and inter-organisational understanding.
- **Good leadership is important:** shared leadership among different stakeholders involved and commitment within all layers of an organisation is needed for sustainable implementation of improvements.
- **Create an enabling environment:** it is important to ensure the organisational structures are configured for the operationalisation of integrated care and to create an enabling environment for change. health and social care organisations should allocate resources for training of professionals focused on comprehensive needs assessments and collaboration in multidisciplinary teams including informal carers. A proper digital infrastructure, compliant to data protection regulations, is also a key factor in creating an enabling environment.
- **Ensure continuity:** it is recommended to health and social care organisations to have an allocated budget to combat problems with sustainability, motivation, and initiative cessation.
- **Improving care takes time:** one should realise that measurable impact may not be realistic in the short-term.

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