

Integrated care policy for the chronically ill in Belgium: a stakeholder analysis

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Background: Health systems in High and Low Income Countries struggle to cope with ageing populations and the increasing burden of chronic diseases. In Belgium, a variety of policy initiatives on integrated chronic care have been developed in recent years: the 2015 joint plan for the chronically ill, the implementation of federal bottom up pilot projects on integrated chronic care and the 2017 - regional - primary care reform in Flanders. In Belgium's complex health policy arena, stakeholder analysis is a first step to shed light upon stakeholders' interests and their ability to affect or block the implementation of these policies.

Methods: Approximately 20 key stakeholders in the field of integrated chronic care were selected for semi-structured interviews. Stakeholder analysis entailed a detailed mapping exercise of stakeholders' power and leadership, knowledge, position, interest and alliances for each discussed policy initiative. Stakeholders included policy makers, representatives of professional associations, health insurance, patient platforms and public services. Next to the stakeholder analysis, a content analysis focused on barriers and facilitators to integrated care was conducted.

Results/analysis: The power analysis and position map show where decision power in the field of integrated chronic care lies, as well as the potential key alliances that exist. The 2014 partial decentralisation of health care has contributed to a growing rift between first and second line care. Most stakeholders gave a below average score on Belgium's progression towards integrated care. The financing system, absence of a well-functioning e-health and data exchange platform, and lack of political support were commonly named barriers.

Discussion: Further steps into integrated care need to be taken by all stakeholders, especially those with the highest levels of power, leadership and interest. Integration and collaboration is needed not only between care providers, but also at the macro level between policy makers.

Key words: stakeholder analysis, chronic care, integrated care policy, Belgium, qualitative research