

Aspen Healthcare Forum Report

Healthcare as an Investment: From Cost to Social Efficiency

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Aspen Institute Romania Healthcare & Quality of Life Program was created to broaden the scope of the debate on health policy, support sustainable reform in the health sector and develop a program community involving all relevant stakeholders (officials and decision-makers, national and European healthcare sector specialists, medical technology and pharma representatives, as well as non-governmental actors from the sector). It provides a neutral and balanced venue, not just for discussing, but also for acting on critical issues affecting the Romanian and regional healthcare systems.

Aspen Healthcare Forum, Healthcare as an investment, from cost to social efficiency

Aspen Healthcare Forum, the public component of the Program, took place on 24 October 2017 with high-level decision-makers from Ministry of Health and National Health Insurance House (NHIH), representatives of the private sector and civil society, foreign and Romanian medical researchers and academics as participants.

The conference focused on three main topics: improving access to medicines and healthcare services in Romania and Central-Eastern Europe and developing accessibility to new technologies in an innovation-based health system.

Organizer: Aspen Institute Romania

Program Partners: Roche, Farmexpert, Janssen, Sanofi, AbbVie, Philips

Aspen Healthcare Forum Partner: Pfizer

Knowledge Partners: EY Romania, Central European Cooperative Oncology Group, Romanian Society for Microbiology

Institutional Partners: Romanian Olympic and Sports Committee, Ministry of Health, Committee for Public Health of the Romanian Senate, Committee for Health & Family of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies, National Health Insurance House, National Institute for Infectious Diseases “Prof. Dr. Matei Bals”, National School of Public Health, Management and Professional Development.

Keynote Remarks

In his intervention, the Minister of Health, Florian Bodog, mentioned the importance of the patient as priority of the health system and the continuous process of reform needed. Other important subjects were preventive health services and the vaccination law.

Victor Negrescu, the Minister Delegate for European Affairs, emphasized that there are not only national solutions to face the problems in the health sector, but European and global solutions should be developed. More funds are needed beyond the 2020 horizon for medical and pharmaceutical research, for infrastructure and human resources.

In her message on behalf of the Minister of Public Finance, Ionut Misa, State Secretary Elena - Oana Iacob, assured the audience that among the priorities for the 2018 budget are increasing the expenditures for the Ministry of Health and NHIH, including the development of fiscal facilities.

Dr. Diana Loreta Paun, State Councilor for Public Health within the Presidential Administration, underlined that the priorities of Romania for the 2019 Presidency of the EU Council should be related to issues concerning prevention and demography.

Mihai Covaliu, President of the Romanian Olympic and Sports Committee (COSR), emphasized the importance of prevention, stating that the best doctor is the one who can prevent a disease rather than cure it. In his vision, sport is the key to reaching prevention. To this end “Joacă pentru Viață” – inspired by Project Play Aspen US, a project developed by AIR in cooperation with COSR, emphasizes the importance of physical literacy for children to promote a healthy lifestyle and ultimately prevent diseases.

1. Improving access to medicines

The EU and Central Eastern European regional perspective

This panel looked at multiple possible policy approaches fostering better access to medicines for the population of Romania as well as the wider Central and Eastern Europe region. A key focus was on market access mechanisms for pharmaceuticals, including innovative drugs. Panelists agreed that improvements need to be made to the presently applicable market access regulatory framework and the way these may assist in pursuing of seemingly opposing objectives of the patients, the public payers and the industry.

A key case study discussed in the panel was related to cancer, which has become one of the main mortality factors at European level, overcoming cardiovascular disease. The need to have a multidisciplinary team, palliative care specialists to treat this pathology and making correlated decisions more effective than those taken gradually was highlighted.

The panelists concluded that the lack of reimbursement and predictability regarding reimbursement represent the main causes for the higher incidence of cancer mortality in Central and Eastern Europe, in comparison to the rest of the EU. Providing similar medical services to all

EU citizens should be a priority, improving survival rates, quality of life, treatment and diminishing symptomatology for oncological patients.

The Romanian case

The future in oncology is represented by personalized medicine, targeted therapy and molecular testing accessible for all cancer patients. The cost of testing is minimal compared to the benefit that each patient would receive when receiving exactly the needed treatment. Early diagnosis is extremely important as well as cancer screening programs.

Concerning cost-volume legislation, cost-volume contracts and cost-volume-result contracts, these mechanisms should ensure increased access of the population to therapy, in terms of efficiency, financial sustainability and predictability of healthcare costs.

The Romanian healthcare system should encourage patient treatments which do not necessarily require hospital admission, changing collective mentality problems, according to which health issues need to be resolved at the hospital level. Another important highlighted aspect was that pharmaceutical distribution and retail must be reconsidered.

Increasing the quality of medical care and costs containment by developing and using medical decision systems is one of the NHIH priorities. Even in the context of budgetary constraints, the budget of the National Social Security Fund health increased with 10% and in 2018 the same percentage increase should be applied for innovative treatments. Since starting July 2019 all information exchanges between the EU Member States in the field of social security will be done only in electronic format, so priority is to finalize the interconnection of the national computer systems. The revision of two European regulations on social security, the development and use of cross-border information systems, and the establishment of a concrete mechanism for the recovery of undue social benefits are also among the priorities.

2. Mapping Romania's healthcare services needs in order to find adequate responses and identify integrative health solutions

The panel showed that Romania needs to better address preventive health services and improve performance of curative health services. The role of the public and private sector in financing and administering Romania's healthcare services is a key question in order to find adequate responses to current challenges, such as ensuring universal access to health services and a competent workforce in the health sector.

Dr. Diana Loreta Paun, State Councilor for Public Health within the Presidential Administration, mentioned that Romania is facing legislative issues such as inconsistency of the health legislation that does not correlate with other sectors, human resources problems, (emigration of doctors and nurses) and organizational and management problems at all levels, not only at hospital level. Decision making in the healthcare system should be based on an evaluation of needs, developing strategic lines of priority, beyond ethical and philosophical aspects. Policy goals should be related

to the health status of the population, Romanian health indicators and a health system responsive to the patient's requirements. The financial aspects highlighted were predictability, sustainability, broader sources of financing, including private insurances.

The situation is a dramatic one in terms of demographic, health and social indicators. The health sector may improve through alternative financing and increase of state funding. A preventive approach and screening for diseases are of utmost importance.

The private health insurance market seems dynamic: in 2017 it was 50 million EUR and 70-80% addressed the private medical system, with more than 300,000 insured persons. The mechanism of mutualism and dispersion of risk facilitated the access of the population to quality medical services. Every three years the market has the capacity to double in volume and the market may become a relevant player for financing health services. A legislative approach is underway to open public health infrastructure to private funding alternative.

During the second part of the discussions the panelists looked at practical health problems, concluding that vaccination reduces the burden of diseases and mortality, acting on the entire population. Reducing communicable diseases, reducing antibiotic resistance as the most cost-effective method, save lives and money in direct and indirect ways.

Another practical example, stroke, is one of the most devastating diseases. In order to save lives and increase the quality of life of survivors it is necessary to invest in community-based rehab centers, stroke units and rehab units, distributed all over the country.

Three components are needed in order to reach a high level of health of the population: the target population, the budget limit and functionality, and an integrated system that assembles all parties.

3. Access to new technologies: Next steps in the development of an innovation-based health system

Telecommunication and information technologies are essential in the interaction between the patients and the medical staff as well as the transmission of medical, imaging and health informatics data from one site to another. Telemedicine has brought the ability to provide clinical healthcare from a great distance, overcoming barriers and improving access to medical services that are not available in some contexts, for instance distant rural communities. The discussions emphasized the need to integrate new technologies in the Romanian healthcare system, facilitate interoperability of technological platforms and grant access to health data in secure and safe ways.

Looking at the future of health, the strategic use of new technologies brings more efficient interconnection of different health organizations: improving health and the quality of the medical care, limiting risk and reducing costs, generating new partnership for health. Priorities at national, regional and European level should focus on funding the medical research.

The key future technologies are immunotherapy research, immune-cell manipulation to fight cancer and the newly developed CAR T-Cell Therapy technologies, as well as possible customized vaccines, including those for non-communicable diseases.