

Major Healthcare Impacts of COVID-19



"Health at a Glance: Europe 2022" outlines the impact of the pandemic on health services across Europe, from primary care to hospital treatment, and the disruptions this placed on the care delivered to non-COVID-19 patients.

The pandemic and the measures implemented to prevent transmission of the virus led to an unprecedented decline in people's mental health across Europe. Whilst the pandemic heavily disrupted access to mental health treatment, services quickly adapted to remote delivery. Teleconsultations in mental health allowed people to maintain access to psychosocial and mental health support during the lockdowns, but there was concern regarding the benefits compared with face-to-face consultations, and whether vulnerable groups had access to telemedicine tools. While services returned to normal following the ease of restrictions, the increase in demand for mental health support, the mental health care backlog and the shortages in staffing are presently having a huge effect on patients' ability to access treatment.

During the first year of the pandemic, activities were suspended, particularly cancer screening programmes, which saw a 6% decline on average for breast and cervical cancer screening. Delay in cancer screening and new diagnosis created backlogs of cancer patients diagnosed at a later stage, making treatment more complex.

Many health systems were unable to maintain care for people with chronic conditions, and patients who required timely acute care did not always receive it. People with chronic conditions are at high risk of complications if their conditions are not well managed. So, to manage these conditions, digital tools were used to support remote monitoring and support rapid assessment. For instance, patients would capture relevant health data and upload it onto a monitoring platform so providers can spot trends and identify signs of deterioration.

In 2020, two million fewer non-urgent surgical procedures were performed. Missing operations means longer waiting lists, longer waiting times and public dissatisfaction. However, increasing the volume of activities is difficult due to shortages in the health workforce. Without enough staff available, it is less likely that health systems can efficiently manage the backlogs and long waiting lists. Several solutions have been identified to address this challenge, including larger investments in training and education, international recruitment, and retention programmes, i.e. incentives and wellbeing programmes.

Additionally, there are plans to increase productivity, by increasing the number of surgical procedures performed in outpatient departments, making better use of operating theaters and reducing bed-blocking by increasing rehabilitation services.

Nevertheless, it is imperative that immediate action is instigated to tackle the shortage of healthcare workers in order to avoid additional pressures and manage the increase in demand and activities.

Source: [OECD](#)

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Published on : Wed, 21 Dec 2022