

Background and themes project ideas

Colombia – along with the rest of the world – faces a number of demographic challenges that if not adequately addressed will have significant and negative effects on its population health. Social, demographic and epidemiological changes have dramatically changed the demand for health services in Colombia. Population ageing and the increase in chronic diseases present a great challenge, especially in rural areas, as health provision is lacking or scarce and often deployed in a fragmented manner. Public health, primary care, and secondary care are often not well coordinated. Moreover, families and social networks of patients are gaining centre attention in the provision of care and support to overcome the lack of coordinated care services. The fragmented nature of health systems and the strong dependence on informal care is increasingly viewed as problematic, because of increasing numbers of empty-nest older people and because of informal caregivers aging themselves.

The problematic nature of care provision in Colombia is even greater due to differences in geography, climate, economic development, cultures, post-war issues, and governance. This variety makes the task of improving and integrating health services in Colombia particularly difficult, and an important challenge for research and policy. High quality health services and social support systems for patients, which are well aligned, and are also available in rural areas, can form more effective and less costly health provision than systems in which services are fragmented. Such developments are further supported by technological advances, which enable patient information to be shared and care to be given from a distance through telemonitoring and eHealth.

Integrated care as a discipline has gained much importance in recent years in improving care in Western societies. The multiple and often complex needs of the population requires approaches that extend beyond traditional acute episodic health care and the services of any single organization; they require instead innovative partnerships between health and social care and informal care, and the use of technology. Translating these insights to the Colombian context to better address the changing demand for healthcare in Colombia is the main aim for the research of the PhD-candidate.

More specifically, we are interested in research:

- (1) that describes and develops innovative integrated care designs for coordinated care and social support for patients and their formal and informal caregivers
- (2) that investigates how innovative integrated care projects in Colombia can contribute to improved patient health and well-being, and positive outcomes for formal and informal caregivers
- (3) that evaluates specific integrated care projects
- (4) that translates and redesigns the mainly “Western” models and theories on integrated care to fit the specific Colombian contexts.

We are both interested in research in rural and non-rural areas, as well as research that only focuses on organisational designs or research that embeds technology in integrated care designs. You can employ quantitative or qualitative research designs as well as mixed methods designs.