

DOI: 10.47743/ejpar.2023-1-4

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS IN THE ROMANIAN HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

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Abstract

The Romanian healthcare system is a predominantly public one, in which public institutions have the main role. The article analyses the role and organization of the main public institutions in the Romanian health system: the Ministry of Health, the Public Health District Authorities and the National Health House in terms of their roles and duties. Following the inductive and deductive analysis, it emerged that public institutions have an essential role in the Romanian health system, contributing to the provision of medical services to the insured, ensuring access to medical care, promoting public health and protecting the interests of patients and the population in general. In conclusion, the situation of the Romanian health system is a complex one: although it faces many problems such as limited resources, old infrastructure or shortage of medical personnel, it manages to provide medical services at low or free costs to all insured persons.

Keywords: *health, health system, public institutions.*

JEL Classification: I13, H83

1. INTRODUCTION

Public institutions are organizations created by public authorities to perform essential functions in any society. Public institutions represent the set-up of organized structures, established for a general, public, strategic need. The public institution was established for a certain mission: governance, education, culture, health, art, religion, protection of human rights, exploration of outer space, maintenance of the quality of the environment, fight against pandemics (Marinescu, 2021, p.4).

The main areas in which there are public institutions are: public administration, education and research, health, culture, social assistance, financial. In Romania, a public institution are the main form of providing

medical services to the population and is financed through the state budget and through the contributions of insured persons.

2. PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM IN ROMANIA

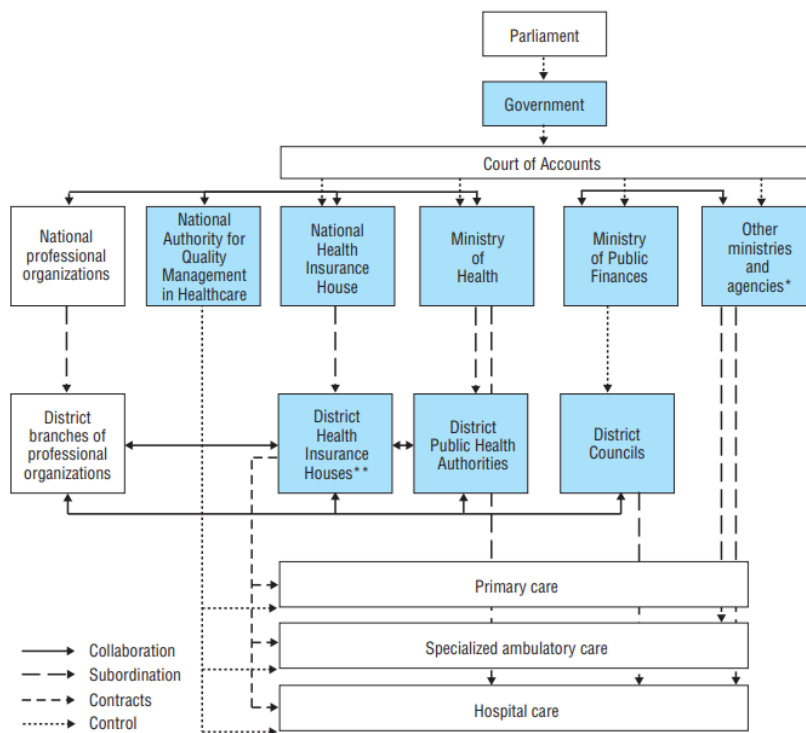
Efforts are being made in Romania, at present to assess the level of satisfaction of the population regarding the health services. At European level, several countries with powerful public Health systems and above average life expectancy are struggling in different stages with diverse issues-migration, social, cultural, financial inequity and so on. Romania, despite the fact that progress has been made in the last few years, appears not to insure a satisfactory public health system, neither for patients, nor for the employees as the expected reform is rather slow-paced.

The Romanian health system is a public system in which the provision of medical services is mainly ensured by the public system through the Ministry of Health and the other medical units subordinated to it. The financing of the health system is ensured by the compulsory contributions to the health insurance, paid by all employees and employers. According to the latest available statistical data, approximately 75-80 % of the total expenditures of the Romanian health system were covered from the state budget, with the remaining 15%-20% coming from private funding or co-payments (OCDE, 2019, 2021).

Any health system consists of all resources for health promotion, prophylaxis, medical care, including health organizations and their relations (Purcărea, 2007).

The main institutions at the national level are: the Ministry of Health, the National Health Insurance House (NHIH) and the professional organizations. The parliament has a key position in the policy process, representing the legislative power and controlling the activities of the government. The Ministry of Public Finances oversees the financial resources raised for and spent on health care and plays a key role in decisions on health sector reforms when they involve changes in public finances. The Court of Accounts controls the formation, administration and utilization of state financial resources in the public sector. The Ministry of Transport, Ministry of National Defense, Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Ministry of Justice and the Romanian Intelligence Agency also play a role in the health system by operating their own parallel health systems as well as through intersectoral cooperation (Vlădescu 2016, p.47).

The Romanian health system is organized as follows:



Source: Vlădescu, 2016, p.47

Figure 1. Organization of the health system in Romania

2.1 Ministry of Health

The Ministry of Health has a leading role in coordinating the Romanian health system. According to the current legislation, the responsibilities of the Ministry of Health within the Romanian public health system are as follows (Ministry of Health, 2023):

- developing and implementing policies on health strategies and programs in the field of population health at national, regional and local level;
- assessing and monitoring the health of the population, ensuring measures for its constant improvement;
- the regulation and authorisation of all public or private institutions in the health system, including public health offices, clinics and centres. It also establishes criteria and standards for the provision of medical services;
- planning and redistributing health resources through the management and allocation of the public health budget, distribution of medical staff and medical equipment to ensure equitable access to health services throughout the country;
- collaboration with other national public institutions and international organizations to successfully develop and implement policies and projects in the field of health;

- implements health reforms and investments within Romania's National Recovery and Resilience Plan.

In order to carry out its activity, the Ministry of Health may request information from the central and local public administration authorities, from other public institutions and private persons with activity in the field of health.

2.2 Public Health Departments

At the territorial level, the Ministry of Health is represented in each county by the Public Health Departments, public institutions with their own legal personality under the prefect's authority. The main responsibilities of the Public Health Departments are (Public Health Departments Bucharest, 2023):

- assessment of the health status of the population in the assigned territory, identification of the main public health problems and priority allocation of resources to the interventions with the highest efficiency in improving the health status of the population;

- evaluation of the control strategies selected in the light of the progress made in improving the health status of the population;

- the organisation, control and financing of national health programmes taking place in the territory of the establishment;

- providing specialized personnel with all the structures of the territorial sanitary system;

- coordination of the ambulance service, medical assistance in case of calamities, disasters and special situations (e.g. pandemics).

The Public Health Departments have a leading role in ensuring the public health in the country and work closely with the other public institutions, local authorities, hospitals, family doctors or other non-governmental organizations to promote and protect the health of the population.

2.3 National Health Insurance House

The reorganization of the health services within the health reform imposed the emergence of the National Health Insurance House as an autonomous public institution. According to the Law on Social Health Insurance – Law 145/1997, the National Health Insurance House is a public, autonomous institution of national interest, with legal personality, whose main object of activity is to ensure the unitary and coordinated functioning of the social health insurance system in Romania. Its mission is to achieve a modern and efficient health insurance system, permanently put at the service of the public interest and the insured, which has the role of improving the health of the population (Law 145/1997).

The main role of National Health Insurance House is to ensure the access of the population to quality medical services through compulsory health insurance. Thus, it manages the Single National Fund for Social Health Insurance, which is fed by the contributions paid by employers and employees.

The obligations of the National Health Insurance House are as follows (National Health Insurance House, 2023):

- ensuring the logistics of the unitary and coordinated functioning of the social health insurance system;

- monitoring the collection and efficient use of the financial resources from the Fund;
- the use of adequate media to represent, inform and support the interests of the insured persons they represent;
- covering the health services needs of individuals, within the limits of the available funds.

Synthesizing, the National Health Insurance House attributions within the health system in Romania are:

- management under the law of the Single National Fund for Social Health Insurance (FNUASS);
- contracting the medical services offered to patients by the medical service providers (hospitals, clinics, family doctors, etc.);
- establishing the medical services covered by the compulsory health insurance as well as the regular updating and review of this package;
- granting and controlling the health card, which is the proof of the health insurance of a number of persons and facilitates access to the medical services offered;
- insurance and approval of medical documents necessary for the provision of medical services (referral tickets, medical prescriptions, etc.) and their control;
- the monitoring and control of expenditure in the health system to ensure the efficient use of resources.

3. CONCLUSIONS

In the Romanian health system, public institutions have a leading role in providing medical services to citizens and in managing human, material and financial resources. The situation of the Health System in Romania is a complex one, although it faces many problems such as limited resources, old infrastructure or shortage of medical personnel manages to provide medical services at low or free costs to all insured persons.

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