The Health Impact Assessment about the introduction of a co-payment duty for health services: a validation of the new guidelines in Southern Italy

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Issue/Problem

In 2012 the Italian National Agency for Regional Health Services (AGENAS) carried out a project of implementation of Health Impact Assessment (HIA) guidelines in four Southern Italian regions (Calabria, Campania, Puglia, Sicilia). In order to validate the guidelines an HIA about the Introduction of a co-payment duty for health services was performed.

Description of the problem

The scoping grid of guidelines was used in order to plan the data collection and the investigations required for the appraisal step. National and regional databases were then consulted to collect regional data about the socio-economic, epidemiological and health-related situation of inhabitants of the Regions involved. Periodically focus groups were then organized with regional representatives in order to elaborate data achieved, to discuss the critical issues of the guidelines and to produce a final report.

Results

To date the co-payment system amounts to 1.73% of the total expenditure for health in Campania and Calabria, to 1.78% in Puglia and to 2.77% in Sicilia. The implementation of a new co-payment duty could lead to remarkable negative effects on health and socio-economic status of the population. It is estimated that 5.1% of Italian families cannot afford the costs for healthcare (10.9% for dental care), especially people that are disadvantaged and live in Southern Italy. Minor adjustments have been made to the scoping grid after the validation through the simulation.

Lessons

The guidelines have proved to be a useful tool for evaluation and research of potential scenarios resulting from the implementation of policies. The validation has allowed us to improve the different grids of Regional guidelines and to provide an answer about the potential impact of the new co-payment duty. This experience is widely exportable in the European context, where the economic crisis lead the local governments to look for new sources of financing for health and where the HIA is not yet sufficiently widespread and put into practice.

Key messages

- A new co-payment duty in Italy could lead to negative effects on health and socio-economic status of the population.
- HIA implementation must be considered a priority in the public health agenda.