

Introduction

We wrote this introduction in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic that hit our Country and the whole world. This is the first health crisis that affects the planet on a large scale after the one caused by the Spanish influenza, during the World War I. However, this time it could cause even greater damage both in terms of human lives and on the entire world economic structure, because of the high mobility of citizens and the globalization of markets.

The dramatic crisis we are experiencing has suddenly revealed the weakness of our health system and the lack of foresight of politics in the management of the National Health Service (NHS), which has been assimilated to an enterprise based on efficiency and cost savings, neglecting that the health of the population is not a marginal advantage, but an economic investment with high returns, both social and economic.

It is 17 years that “Rapporto Osservasalute” describes our NHS, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses. The successes in terms of health and survival have always been a flagship of our NHS. However, there has always been questioning about the sustainability of these successes, undermined by the long aging process of the population and by the reduction of resources allocated in the last 10 years to the Public Health sector.

In 2018, the total public and private healthcare costs borne by families amounted to approximately € 153 billion in total, of which € 115 billion of public system and approximately € 38 billion related to the private sector.

From 2010 to 2018, public health expenditure increased, in average, of only 0.2% per year, much less than the Gross Domestic Product (1.2%). The slowdown in the public sector was followed by a more sustained growth in private household spending, equal to 2.5%.

From 2010 to 2018 the number of beds decreased by about 33,000 units, with an average reduction of 1.8%, continuing the trend already observed since the second half of '90s.

In 2017 the number of medical doctors and dentists of the NHS was 105,557 units, recording a drop of 1.5% compared to 2014, when they were 107,276; regarding the nursing staff, there was a reduction of 1.7%, as it passed from 269,151 in 2014 to 264,703 in 2017.

180 authors contributed to the writing of the present Report, covering a growing variety of aspects and issues. In particular, the Report is composed of:

- **86 Core indicators**, which describe essential aspects of the health of the Italians and the health services of all regions of our Country, with the help of graphs, tables and cartograms;
- **24 Boxes**, focused on innovative experiences in specific realities;
- **9 Insights**, which analyze some priority problems and propose possible solutions. They are published on the website [www. Osservasalute.it](http://www.Osservasalute.it).

Recommendations

COVID-19 pandemic, experienced in a globalized era, will have developments and consequences that are currently difficult to predict with precision, but it will certainly serve as a warning on the fragility of the Regional Health Services in dealing with emergencies. In particular, the COVID-19 emergency highlighted the need to reorganize and support with greater resources the role of the primary care that could have stemmed, especially in the first phase of the pandemic, a part of the emergency by preventing it from spilling onto hospital structures, unprepared to face a high number of hospitalizations.

Another key point to analyze is the decentralized Public Health organization. Indeed, regions have moved very differently from each other, not always in harmony with the central Government. The country's reaction to the pandemic and the increase in resources by the Government should be recorded with satisfaction. Precisely, in the last few months more resources than in the previous years have been allocated to healthcare system. However, it is now important to quickly plan, organize, manage and control the healthcare system, flattening regional heterogeneity.

For this reason, the “Osservatorio Nazionale sulla Salute nelle Regioni Italiane” will activate a specific monitoring in the COVID-19 era, the results of which will be published in the next “Rapporto Osservasalute”.