

Supplement the health information system by means of longitudinal data

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Summary 40 lines

The FPS Social Security wishes to improve its understanding of the Belgian population's health evolution, notably by means of indicators belonging to the longitudinal approach of health. To this aim, the BeLHIS project (Belgian Longitudinal Health Information System) analysed the methods of longitudinal health data supply and took into account the evolution of related institutional, organizational and legal elements. The research was based on a comparative analysis of international initiatives, the study of innovative projects and the analysis of specific chronic health topics. The results of the research are detailed throughout eight working papers.

Beside the well-known prospective epidemiological methods, new alternatives are now available to shape a vision of health dynamics, including using cross-sectional data. Indeed, the technological advances enhance the data linkage and the information flow between all data suppliers. By facilitating the health data flow, the e-Health platform is settled in Belgium as a tool for a better management of the healthcare and for a faster access to the existing services.

In Belgium, most data sources are administrative. Their utmost utilization requires an effective coordination of all data producers, as well as the use of the National Register number. The privacy

law applies to any data processing with a longitudinal aim. Several obligations impose upon the persons in charge of such processing with regard to data security, reporting to the Privacy Commission, or in order to enable the involved persons to exert their law-granted rights.

A comparative analysis of both British and Danish statistical systems provides indications to reinforce the Belgian health information system: strengthen the independence of the statistical authority, set up quality control procedures and promote transparency in the statistical data processing are suggested.

The BeLHIS project's case-studies illustrate the advantages of developing a dynamic conception of population's health, through practical examples of longitudinal initiatives implemented beyond our borders about cancers, diabetes and joint replacements. When appropriate, the operational and evaluation features of those initiatives will inspire Belgian health professionals and decision-makers. The BeLHIS project presents moreover the operational aspects of a data linkage carried out by the VUB within the framework of a study on social factors of health inequalities related to breast cancer mortality.

The development of a longitudinal health perspective requires a comprehensive system of health data coordination. In this system, data providers and users work together at establishing the health profile of the population, defining the efficiency of the healthcare system and at elaborating sound health policies. The BeLHIS project wanted to inform public and private agencies about the added-value of such an approach. It tried to foster the participation of the largest number of actors of the sector in this new perspective.