



Cap Roig beach, Calonge, Girona – La Costa Brava

The Autonomous Community of Catalonia, Spain

General overview

Catalonia is one of the 17 autonomous communities of Spain. With an area of 32 113 km², covering 6.3% of the territory of the country, it is also one of the largest (1). The region is home to 7 747 709 people, 16,3% of the total population of Spain (2). Its four provinces – Barcelona, Girona, Lleida and Tarragona – are divided into 947 municipalities (3). Barcelona, capital of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia, Spain (hereafter, the Autonomous Community) is its most populated city and the second most populated in the country with over 1.63 million inhabitants (4,5). The Autonomous Community has its own official language and a strong cultural identity.

The health model of the Autonomous Community is funded through taxes and integrated into the national health system of Spain. The authorities of the Autonomous Community created its Health

Service in 1991 as the official entity for planning, assessing and purchasing health services, keeping the functions of providing and financing them separate. As a result, the Health Service contracts all health-care providers, and public and private bodies financing/providing health services coexist. Although the whole population of Spain is covered by publicly financed health services, about 20% of the population in the Autonomous Community use both systems. In 2021, life expectancy at birth per 100 000 population was 79.7 years and 85 years for men and women, respectively (6). GDP per capita is € 29 111 (2021) (7).

According to the general principles of the Autonomous Community's Health Service:

- health care is a publicly financed universal public service available to all residents;

- health care, as a comprehensive concept, is integrated into the health-care system, with special emphasis on primary health care;
- the Health Plan of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia, Spain, 2021–2025 (8), approved in December 2021, is the governing backbone of public health and welfare-service policies;
- in providing health-care services, the health-care system seeks to avoid geographical or social inequities;
- the organization of health care incorporates rationalization, efficacy, simplification and efficiency;
- health-care services are territorially based.

Regional activities linked to the WHO European Programme of Work

The following activities are linked to the three core priorities of the European Programme of Work (EPW): (i) moving towards universal

health coverage (UHC); (ii) promoting health and well-being; and (iii) protecting against health emergencies.



Moving towards UHC

Achieving UHC is one of the targets of UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) no. 3: to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

On 27 June 2017, the authorities of the Autonomous Community approved Law 9/2017 on the universalization of health care paid by public funds through the Health Service. The Law implied recognition of the universal right to health care for all residents in the Autonomous Community, regardless of age, gender, place of residence, or social, economic, ethnic and religious status. Thus, in the Autonomous Community, UHC ensures that no one is left behind and that everyone can access the full spectrum of essential, quality health services without incurring financial hardship. These services include health promotion/disease prevention measures, rehabilitation, and palliative care across the life course.

The Health Plan of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia, Spain, 2021–2025 (8) is the reference instrument and framework for all public action in the field of health within the scope of the Autonomous Community. With the objective of improving the health and quality of life of the population, it acts as the Health System's compass.

In elaborating the Health Plan (8), the following three elements contributed to creating its strategic vision, which commits to achieving the SDGs (9): (i) the *Thirty-year retrospective of Catalan health planning: driver of health system transformation* (10); (ii) the Interdepartmental and Intersectoral Plan of Public Health (PINSAP) (11); and (iii) the situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.



Promoting health and well-being

In 2009, the authorities of the Autonomous Community approved the Community's Public Health Law (No. 18/2009), establishing PINSAP (11) as the basic tool for implementing public health action in the Autonomous Community and a political commitment. PINSAP (11) was elaborated by the Regional Interministerial Health Commission (comprising representatives of all the autonomous communities and approved by the authorities of the Autonomous Community of Catalonia. Since 2014, PINSAP (11) has been included in all its plans.

PINSAP (11) seeks to involve the local administration and the society at large through collaborative work with their representatives. Based on the WHO Health-in-All-Policies strategy (12), it promotes a regional whole-of-government/whole-of-society approach and proposes the evaluation of the health impact of the main policies and strategies. The most important of these relates to the promotion of community health, the elaboration of social prescribing projects, the development of a map of assets, the development of a health-impact-assessment screening test ("Test Salut"), and collaboration with the Health and Crises Observatory of the Agency for Health Quality and Assessment of Catalonia (AQuAS).

PINSAP (11) emphasizes that evaluation of the impact of its activities on health should be included in all government policies as well as in municipal policies at the local level. It also underlines the relationship between health and sustainable development within the framework of the 2030 Agenda (9). To this end, it focuses on nine new priority topics (obesity, environment and climate change, addiction, smoking, vulnerability and social exclusion, emerging diseases, ageing, mental health, and well-being).



Protecting against health emergencies

The COVID-19 crisis confirmed a widespread social consensus on the responsibility of health authorities to ensure protection against health emergencies. Reliable risk communication has become a strategic responsibility, putting the spotlight of public scrutiny on the science and politics of public health and on the social accountability of public health expertise. In that sense, the authorities of the Autonomous Community approved a civil protection emergency plan for the governance and coordination of the response. A multidisciplinary committee, comprising 45 professionals and policy-makers from different sectors, proposed the adoption of measures to fight the coronavirus in the Autonomous Community, always under the advice of the public health specialists in its Health Department.

On the other hand, the pandemic showed the critical importance of acting rapidly and decisively and highlighted the need for preparedness and prompt response. The Epidemiological Information System in the Autonomous Community was widely enhanced to obtain real-time data for use in providing both support in decision-making and information to the population. It integrates previous non-related registries of clinical records, microbiological results, contact tracing and outbreak notification. It also consolidates data from digital apps designed to monitor case symptoms and contact notification, and to relieve pressure on the health-care system by, for example, facilitating the scheduling of primary-health-care programmes and the tracking of sick leave.

Actions linked to the EPW flagship initiatives

(The Mental Health Coalition; Empowerment through digital health; The European Immunization Agenda 2030; Healthy behaviours: incorporating behavioural and cultural insights.)

Initiatives relative to the Mental Health Coalition

The authorities of the Autonomous Community have prioritized mental health in the current legislation, with important milestones for the coming years, including:

- elaboration of the National Plan on Mental Health (13) to enhance coordination among departments of the regional and local authorities and social entities with regard to mental health and emotional well-being;
- creation of a new agency on integrated social and health matters (14) with the main objective of providing the interdisciplinary care of health and social professionals, ensuring the continuity of care of both networks;
- development of a new action plan on suicide

prevention (15) with the aim of reducing attempted suicide and social stigma through community action;

- promotion of a new drug-addiction plan (16) committed to coordinating and leading the approach to dealing with health and social problems related to drug use and other potentially addictive behaviours;
- creation of a new programme on emotional well-being and community health (17) to improve the promotion of emotional well-being in the Autonomous Community and decrease the medicalization of emotional distress;
- development of the Mental Health Care Programme for at-risk Children and Youth (18).

Initiatives relative to empowerment through digital health

La **Meva Salut** (19) is a personal digital health space that allows the citizens of the Autonomous Community to relate in a non-face-to-face manner with the Health System. It makes it easier for its users to consult **clinical reports, diagnoses** and **results of clinical analyses** and **tests** that are part of their clinical history. Patients can also access their current **medication plans** through the pharmacy, request **a primary-care visit** and access various non-face-to-face care services, such as **eConsulta** (20).

The last initiative is a digital communication tool for the joint use of patients and health-care professionals that complements face-to-face care. It allows citizens to send queries at any time and from any device to their primary-care doctor or nurse and receive a response within a maximum of two working days.

Initiatives relative to the European Immunization Agenda 2030

One of the main goals of the Department of Health of the Autonomous Community is to protect its population from **vaccine-preventable diseases**.

The Health System has an optimal immunization schedule (21) for all children, adolescents and

adults resident in the Autonomous Community; all vaccines are free of charge for everyone. Besides the calendar, the authorities of the Autonomous Community also provide vaccines, according to current recommendations, for people at risk, including travellers.

Initiative specific to the Autonomous Community of Catalonia

The following initiatives are underway.

- A new agency for integrated social and health care is under development with the main objective of providing joint interdisciplinary care of health and social professionals, thus ensuring that both networks share continuity of care.
- It is the aim to increase pediatric vaccine uptake and access to new and existing vaccines for everyone, regardless of age, identity and geographic location.
- In creating PINSAP (11), the aim was to enable all sectors in the Autonomous Community, as well as society, to capitalize directly on their respective influences on health and well-being. It is anticipated that this will contribute to the development of healthy public policies and health-promotion and disease-protection initiatives, especially those targeting the most vulnerable groups in society. PINSAP (11) has resulted in starting a gradual process of promoting intersectorality in the design and implementation of initiatives related to the social determinants of health.

The three most important topics for collaboration within the Regions for Health Network

These are:

1. innovation in public health
2. equity and health
3. health in all policies.

Main partners and collaborators

These are:

- Ministry of Health of Spain
- Public Health Agency of Barcelona (ASPB)
- authorities of the Autonomous Community;
- Public Health Agency of the Girona Provincial Council (Dipsalut)
- Catalan Health Service (CatSalut)
- Catalan Society of Family and Community Medicine (CAMFiC)
- Catalan Health Institute (CHI)
- Catalan Society of Family and Community Nursing (AIFiCC)
- Agency of Health Quality and Assessment of Catalonia (AQUAS)

- *Public Health Society of Catalonia and Balears (SSPCB)*
- *Social and Health Catalan Consortium (CSSC)*
- *Catalan Hospitals Union (UCH)*
- TIC Salut
- EUPHA Migration Section
- nongovernmental organizations
- health-maintenance organizations

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¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all URLs accessed 14 May 2024.

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