

What makes integration of chronic care so difficult? A macro-level analysis of barriers and facilitators in Belgium

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Introduction

Although many countries have been implementing integrated care, the scale-up stays difficult. Macro-level system barriers play an important role. By selecting three key policies, which have implemented integrated care in Belgium over the last 10 years, we aim to go beyond the identification of their specific barriers and facilitators to obtain an overarching generic view.

Methods

27 participants were purposefully selected, to include all important stakeholders involved on the macro-level in chronic care in Belgium. Semi-structured interviews were guided by a timeline of policies and an inductive thematic analysis was performed.

Results

Barriers and facilitators were identified on both health care and policy level. The major factors restraining the scale-up of integrated care are the fee-for-service reimbursement system, data sharing and the fragmentation of responsibilities between different levels of government. Remarkably, these factors strongly interact.

Discussion

This paper highlights the importance of homogenization of responsibilities of governments regarding integrated care and the interdependency of policy and health care system factors. A whole system change is needed instead of the current Belgian model of prolonged search for common ground between conflicting opinions. Political commitment and citizen participation will be crucial.

Key words

Integrated care, health care policy, chronic care, stakeholder interviews, governance, health care systems