

The Swiss Learning Health System (SLHS)

Building a socio-technical infrastructure to address health system's needs



Key Facts about the Swiss Learning Health System

The SLHS aims at building a national platform for health systems and services research, policy and practice. The SLHS relies on cyclical dynamics to identify issues, systematize relevant evidence, present alternative actions that allow to select the best action, implement change, observe its consequences and, if necessary, revise and reshape the response. Thus, the SLHS fosters the health system to continuously learn and adapt to arising challenges.

The SLHS provides the following bridging mechanisms for research, policy and practice:

- Evidence syntheses and stakeholder dialogues as core activities
- Scientific capacity building to educate a new workforce for the health system
- Designing a health data warehouse to facilitate access to relevant health information.

The need for a Swiss Learning Health System

National and international institutions have called for increased efforts to better coordinate research and practice in the field of health services research and health systems as such. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) in the US, for example, has highlighted the need to respond to systemic problems that limit the capacity of health systems and that would allow to respond in a timely manner to new emerging factors that may influence delivery of care. In Switzerland the Swiss Academies of Medical Sciences (SAMW), the Federal Office of Public

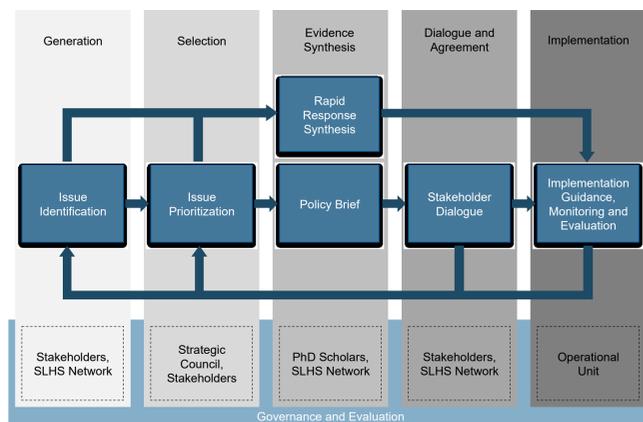
Health and the Bangerter Foundation are either actively supporting or promoting efforts to respond to this need. Besides the necessity to foster research in health systems and health care, the Swiss Learning Health System response to the lack of coordination of activities, cross-linking of actors and comprehensive research approaches in Switzerland.

Building the Swiss Learning Health System

Currently funded for four years by the Swiss Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) the Swiss Learning Health System (SLHS) is set up as a collaborative project between seven Swiss academic partner institutions. It officially started in January 2017.

Bridging Research, Policy and Practice

In order to be responsive to current health system needs, the research agenda within the SLHS is developed in strong collaboration with all partners involved. This not only facilitates the seamless flow of information and evidence at the levels of policy, research and practice but it will eventually translate into a continuous learning process that matches the system's research needs with the appropriate results.



Issue Identification and Prioritization

The first step in the learning health system is to identify pressing topics and challenges in the health system, which are defined by the SLHS network and relevant stakeholders. Based on different suggestions a topic list is developed which is updated on a regular basis. The topic list forms the basis for the process of issue prioritization.

Evidence Syntheses

Based on the prioritized topics, the different partner institutions will produce overall 20 policy briefs over the course of the first funding period. Policy briefs aim at (1.) identifying available research evidence on a specific policy issue and (2.) presenting relevant policy/program options in a comprehensive way to key stakeholders (including policymakers). The policy brief will be the scientific basis for the stakeholder dialogue. In situations where a quick response to urgent health policy issues is needed rapid response syntheses will be developed. They identify and synthesize the best course of action by examining current evidence and possible solutions. This is done through a top-down approach thanks to the participation of the network members of the institutions involved in the SLHS, representing the full range of competencies with respect to scientific disciplines and the functions of the health system.

Stakeholder Dialogue

A stakeholder dialogue is a structured interaction where stakeholders are brought together for the purpose of defining a common ground and to identify areas of agreement and disagreement on how to solve problems in the Swiss health system.

The dialogue takes the form of a deliberation where stakeholders work together to develop solutions that are acceptable to all parties. Deliberation is based on reasoned debate among relevant parties. Thus, during the dialogue all stakeholders are invited to express their views – and the reasons behind them – in a constructive environment that facilitates mutual sharing and understanding of each other's positions.

Scientific Capacity Building

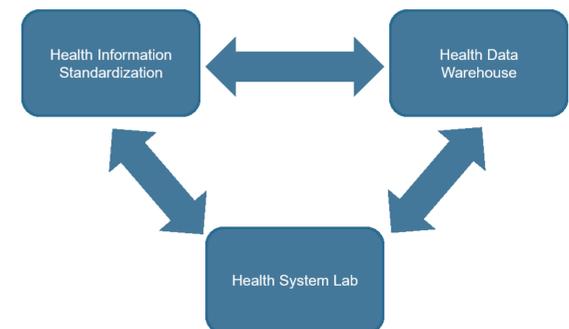
Scientific capacity building is an inherent element of the SLHS. The project partners seek to educate a new generation of researchers who understand health systems and services research as a cooperative endeavour involving multiple stakeholders. The availability of well-trained and capable scientists with the ability to understand and structure research in the intersection of health systems and services, policy and practice is essential for establishing a successful and sustainable learning health system. Therefore, the SLHS-SSPH+ PhD Scholarship Program offers courses in the following areas:

- Design and Vision of a LHS
- Health Systems and Services
- Evidence-Informed Policy Framework
- Implementation Science
- Communication in a LHS

SLHS Data Warehouse

An important prerequisite for health systems research are standards for the structure and content of data, including structured entry points to existing data sources, as well as the application of appropriate analysis methods of coded patient and health system data. These standards need to be suitable for the collection of new data, as well as the transformation of existing data into a standardized reporting format.

Therefore, the third objective of the SLHS is to develop national data standards for structured reporting and, where appropriate, the collection of new multipurpose health information.



Funding Partners

- University of Lucerne (host institution)
 - Department of Health Sciences and Health Policy
 - Center for Law and Health
 - Center for Comparative Constitutional Law and Religion
- Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute (SwissTPH)

- University of Neuchâtel, Information Management Institute (IMI)
- University of Lugano, Institute of Economics (IdEP)
- University of Zurich, Institute of Primary Care
- Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW)
- University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland (SUPSI)

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