

Economic Inefficiencies in the Swiss Healthcare System

Mélanie Lötscher-Stamm (ZHAW / UniLu)

Switzerland's healthcare system faces mounting pressure to deliver optimal health outcomes while managing escalating costs and resource constraints. With trends such as population growth and ageing, and the development of new (partially very costly) therapies, Mélanie's PhD research focuses on identifying and understanding current economic inefficiencies through three projects:

The first project investigates what researchers mean when discussing “efficiency” in healthcare provision research. A systematic scoping review examining definitions and understandings of “efficiency” in health-related research was conducted. While widely used over recent decades, this review revealed many different understandings of the term and highlighted the need for clear, explicit definitions in efficiency research, especially when results potentially influence policy decisions.

The second project investigates so-called “non-urgent” emergency department (ED) visits, a phenomenon heavily discussed in Swiss politics. By analyzing patient demographics, visit patterns, and services provided, this study seeks to understand what happens at non-urgent ED visits, how the phenomenon changed with Covid-19, and what percentage of ambulatory ED patients could theoretically be treated outside EDs.

The third project examines managed care organizations (MCOs) and their impact on treatment efficiency. The goal of this project is to assess whether physicians in MCOs (with financial incentives for efficient care) treat patients more efficiently than physicians outside MCOs, even when their patients aren't insured through managed care models.

In combination, these three projects aim to provide policymakers and healthcare administrators with evidence-based insights and practical recommendations for addressing some of Switzerland's healthcare efficiency challenges while maintaining high-quality care.