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## **A study shows that hospital planning in Switzerland fails to reflect population needs**

**A new study conducted by the University of St. Gallen on behalf of Fondation Groupe Mutuel provides a new basis in favour of supra-regional hospital planning. It shows that in 25-50% of cases, patients already seek treatment outside their canton and are therefore willing to travel longer distances. On this basis, Groupe Mutuel calls for comprehensive healthcare planning in five to seven healthcare regions.**

Hospitals in Switzerland are facing major challenges: rising costs, loss-making facilities, staff shortages and an increasing trend towards outpatient care. Hospital planning based on cantonal borders is slowly reaching its limits. Although the need to address this issue has been recognised by Parliament, the Swiss Confederation and the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Health Ministers (CDS), concrete proposals and an in-depth analysis of the actual situation are still lacking.

The University of St. Gallen has conducted an analysis of the hospital landscape in Switzerland on behalf of Fondation Groupe Mutuel. The study shows that cantonal planning boundaries have little to do with the actual provision of care for many service groups. In most of the regions studied, 25 to 50% of the population seek treatment outside their canton. In some regions, such as Mesocco (Canton Graubünden), this figure rises to 95%. This applies to both inpatient primary care and elective surgery procedures.

Patients who seek treatment outside their canton are systematically willing to travel longer distances. They do not choose a hospital based on its proximity, but on its quality, expertise and the language spoken there, as the study shows. "Intercantonal healthcare services are not a marginal phenomenon reserved for highly specialised medicine, but the reality for many treatments in basic care. Planning should take these circumstances into account. In addition, service groups should be reviewed according to their urgency and complexity, and planning levels should be defined on this basis, both locally and nationally," explained Prof. Dr Alexander Geissler, professor of health economics, policy and management and co-author of the study.

A more detailed analysis of hospital capacity usage shows that there are overlaps in the service mandates of neighbouring cantons. In most cantons, one-third to four-fifths of hospitals provide 80% to 90% of the treatments within a service group.

"The reality for patients shows that the idea of a "local hospital" close to home is outdated. When it comes to hospital planning, we need to move away from the cantons' own interests and focus on those of the patients," said Thomas Boyer, CEO of Groupe Mutuel.

Groupe Mutuel aims to achieve comprehensive healthcare planning with a focus on quality. As the study shows, service groups should be assigned at the appropriate level. In addition to the existing planning levels of the Confederation and the cantons, five to seven healthcare regions could ensure greater efficiency. Furthermore, quality indicators in line with Value-based Healthcare and minimum case numbers must also be taken into account. At the same time, local outpatient care should also be included in hospital planning.

"We need to move away from hospital planning and towards healthcare planning. The study shows that, in addition to highly specialised medicine at federal level, it is inter-cantonal healthcare regions that allow actual patient flows to be better taken into account. Local primary care must also be included in hospital planning," concluded Thomas Boyer.

The full study by the University of St. Gallen is available on request.



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### **About Groupe Mutuel**

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