

## **Monitoring performance, improving health: Enhancing health services impact on population health**

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### ABSTRACT

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Recent developments in health policy have highlighted the importance of assessing performance of health services using a comprehensive set of outcomes, including health outcomes. Over the last decade, the contribution of health services has been estimated as modest, leading many policymakers to conclude that the strongest influences on health originated from outside the health care sector. Current trends and new evidence invite us to revisit these assumptions. In fact, the technological transition has brought about an array of novel preventive, therapeutic and diagnostic tools that may reduce the burden of disease. In the context of the on-going demographic and epidemiological transitions, even modest improvement of health at the individual level is likely to have a substantial impact at the population level.

In this perspective, we developed a three-fold health performance initiative in order to improve the health impact of health care services at the population level. Firstly, we put together an evaluation program focusing on the significant health care reform that occurred in the Montreal region, Quebec, Canada. Evaluation was undertaken using a multifaceted approach (a monitoring program based on selected indicators, board-funded and independent research projects addressing key issues). Secondly, we systematically appraised health and health care indicators used for the purpose of monitoring the health impact of health care system transformations in Canada and OECD countries. Thirdly, we synthesised research findings in reports that summarised the health system changes that had occurred in the region, their impact on performance and recommendations for decision making. Active dissemination was achieved through oral presentations, website and print materials aimed at key decision makers in the community and resulted in a number of policy decisions at the regional and provincial levels.

Renewed interest in health performance may provide needed criteria to guide and support decision-making and accountability processes. Such an orientation may contribute to reconciling patient care and population health perspectives, a necessary step if we are to face the upcoming health care crisis.

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