

Synergies for Care: A Mixed-Methods Research on the Integration of Territorial Health and Social Services From the Health Professionals' Perspective (SYN4CARE)

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Citation: Sciotti G, Mostarda C, Pavel MS, Longobucco Y, Dionisi S, Longhini J, Biagioli V, Facchinetti G. "Synergies for Care: A Mixed-Methods Research on the Integration of Territorial Health and Social Services From the Health Professionals' Perspective (SYN4CARE)" (2026) *International Journal of Health Supplements* 1(Suppl. 1):66-67. Supp. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.82051/ijhs-2026-1>

Introduction. Integrated health and social care is crucial to address ageing populations and rising demand for community-based care. In Italy, fragmented governance and weak coordination between health and social services still limit continuity of care. The SYN4CARE Italian multicentre project, coordinated by the Istituto Superiore di Sanità, investigates professionals' perceptions and experiences of integrated community-based care by exploring how professionals working in community-based health, social, and socio-health services define integrated care, assess its level of implementation, and identify the main barriers and effective strategies for its application in daily practice across different Italian regions.

Methods. SYN4CARE uses a convergent mixed-methods design combining an online questionnaire and focus groups. Around 300 professionals from eight Italian regions complete the survey and 100–160 participate in 16 focus groups. Participants include healthcare and social care professionals with at least two years of community practice. Quantitative data are analysed with descriptive statistics and qualitative data through thematic analysis, then integrated.

Results. Professionals are expected to describe integration mainly as a relational and collaborative process. Although some effective local networks exist, integration remains uneven due to resource constraints, limited training, weak digital interoperability and unclear professional roles.

Discussion. The project will also develop an Integrated Care Competence Scale to assess professionals' collaborative and holistic care skills. Findings will support workforce training, organizational improvement and policy strategies to strengthen integrated community care in Italy.

Keywords: Workforce Integration, Integrated Care, Health and Social Care Integration, Interprofessional Collaboration, Healthcare Professionals, Social Care Professionals, Care Coordination

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Funding: This research received no external funding. **Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.