

2. Introduction

The HCP is a centre for visionary thinking and actions that promote consumer-related healthcare in Europe. Tomorrow's health consumer will not accept any traditional borders. In order to become a powerful actor, and to build the necessary reform pressure from below, the consumer will need access to knowledge in order to compare health policies, consumer services and quality outcomes. HCP wants to add to this development.

In this first issue of a Euro-Canada Index, Canada's Frontier Centre for Public Policy is committed to evaluating health policy across Canada. The FCPP is an independent, non-partisan think-tank based in Winnipeg, with activities in many areas of public policy, including healthcare. All the countries included in the EHCI share Canada's commitment to accessible and effective healthcare, and by comparing the performances of Canada's healthcare institutions with the extremely varied systems of the 29 European states, we can gain much insight into how Canada is succeeding and how it can improve.

2.1 Background

Since 2004, HCP has published the Swedish Health Consumer Index (www.vardkonsumentindex.se, also in an English translation). By ranking the 21 county councils by 12 indicators concerning the design of systems policy, consumer choice, service level and access to information, we introduced benchmarking as an element in consumer empowerment.

For the first pan-European index (Euro Health Consumer Index, EHCI) in 2005, HCP aimed to follow the same approach, *i.e.*, selecting a number of indicators that describe to what extent the national healthcare systems are user-friendly, thus providing a basis for comparing different national systems.

Though it is still a somewhat controversial standpoint, HCP advocates that quality comparisons within the field of healthcare are a win-win situation. For the consumer, better information will create a better platform for informed choice and action. For governments, authorities and providers, the sharpened focus on consumer satisfaction and quality outcomes will support change. This applies not only to evidence of shortcomings and method flaws, but it also illustrates the potential for improvement. With such a view, the brand new EHCI was designed to become an important benchmark that supports interactive assessment and improvement.

The first EHCI included 12 European countries. In 2006, the EHCI expanded, and on October 1, 2007, the HCP launched the third consecutive EHCI, which evaluated all 27 EU members, Switzerland and Norway. The 2008 Euro-Canada Health Consumer Index (ECHCI) adds Canada to this mix.

2.2 Project Manager

Ms Rebecca Walberg, the Director for Health Policy at the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, is the lead researcher for the Canadian component of the Euro-Canada Index.

Arne Björnberg, PhD is the project manager for the EHCI 2007 and the inaugural EHCI.

Dr. Björnberg is an experienced research director in Sweden. His experience includes serving as CEO of the Swedish National Pharmacy Corporation (Apoteket AB), Director of Healthcare & Network Solutions for IBM Europe, Middle East & Africa, and CEO of the University Hospital of Northern Sweden (Norrlands Universitetssjukhus, Umeå).

Dr. Björnberg was also the project manager for the EHCI 2005 and 2006.

Ms Raluca Nagy, HCP, was the researcher for the EHCI 2007.