

Project Title:

Explaining Inequalities in Health and Healthcare Access:
the Role of Regional Differences in Healthcare Services and Expenditure

Name, address, affiliation, phone and email of principal investigator (PI):

Orso Cristina Elisa
Dipartimento di Economia, Università Ca' Foscari,
San Giobbe, 873, Cannaregio,
30123 Venezia
Tel. 3936392022
e-mail cristina.orso@unive.it

Name and affiliation of other researchers in the team:

Di Novi Cinzia
Dipartimento di Economia, Università Ca' Foscari,
San Giobbe, 873, Cannaregio,
30123 Venezia
e-mail cinzia.dinovi@unive.it

Rizzi Dino
Dipartimento di Economia, Università Ca' Foscari,
San Giobbe, 873, Cannaregio,
30123 Venezia
e-mail dino.rizzi@unive.it

Zantomio Francesca
Dipartimento di Economia, Università Ca' Foscari,
San Giobbe, 873, Cannaregio,
30123 Venezia
e-mail francesca.zantomio@unive.it

Executive summary

The presence of large inequalities in the health sector (in particular between poorer and better off individuals or areas) continues to be a cause of concern, both in developing and industrialized countries (Wagstaff, 2002; Wagstaff et al., 2003). Inequalities are found in health outcomes (Van Doorslaer et al., 1997; Gwatkin et al., 2000; Wagstaff, 2002), the utilization of health services (Gwatkin et al., 2000), and also in terms of benefits received from public expenditures in health services (Castro-Leal et al., 1999, 2000; Sahn and Younger, 2000). However, until today little is known about the determinants of these inequalities and in particular about the mechanisms through which they operate and propagate across different sub-groups.

Our study takes advantage of the decentralized setting of the healthcare system in Italy to examine the role of regional differences in healthcare services and expenditure play in generating inequalities in health and healthcare access. Indeed, the regional organization of the Italian national healthcare system offers a “unique field” for exploring the sources of health inequalities as well as for testing the effects of political decentralization in widening health and healthcare inequalities.

As a first step, the project aims at examining the association between health inequalities and regional differences in healthcare provision at the regional level. This step will allow to assess what is the contribution of health and healthcare access inequality (between the twenty Italian regions) to the overall health inequality observed in the country. Italy is an interesting case because its institutional setting makes it possible to explore whether changes in the ways regions organize the health system influence in any way inequalities in health. To this end, we will use the cross-sectional survey *Indagine Multiscopo sulle Famiglie, Aspetti della Vita Quotidiana*, that is part of the Istat Multiscopo survey system carried out every year by the Italian National Statistical Office (ISTAT). The following step aims at understanding whether regional differences in healthcare services and expenditure may explain inequalities in healthcare access. Specifically, we will investigate whether decentralization has produced an effect in widening inequalities in health and healthcare access. For this second step, we will use regional panel data (from 1993 to 2010) from the ISTAT database “Health for All - Italy”, that is part of a program managed by the World Health Organization.

We expect that the central government policies concerning healthcare expenditure growth control, combined with the decentralization in the administration and provision of healthcare facilities may result in interregional inequalities that may worsen the existing regional divergences.